We Belong Yogether

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i hear them calling for you

The beginning

"Mr. Snape, there's no need for such an attitude. This was just a harmless joke..."

"Harmless? Really? Harmless? THEY TRIED TO KILL ME! HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT IT WAS A JOKE? LET ALONE HARMLESS!" Shouted Severus at the unfairness of Dumbledore. The headmaster looked at him very seriously and the twinkle in his eyes was lost.

"Mr. Black will be punished accordingly for his transgression, but I'm sure that he never meant to kill you. Mr. Lupin is quite blameless, seeing as he never knew of this situation until this morning, and Mr. Potter got to you on time. You are unharmed and there is no need to raise your voice. Now, I will ask if you to keep Mr. Lupin's condition to yourself."

The voice of the headmaster was stern. It gave no way to arguments. Severus felt his heart break at this people's disregard for his life.

Dumbledore looked at the broken boy before him and felt pity for him, but there was no way that he would allow Remus to be taken down when he was not at fault for what happened. He knew that this was not the best way to go about it but he had no other choice. He'd make sure to make it up to the boy later...

Both Dumbledore and Snape were locked in a staring match, being looked at by Remus, James and Sirius. The first two boys were fearfully expecting a blow-out, while the third had a very satisfied 'Snape is a loser' grin plastered on his face.

After a moment, Severus looked down and turned towards the door.

"As you wish, headmaster." Said the boy in a very defeated tone. Then, when he reached the door, he added: "Forgive me for being naive and believing that my life was as worthy as any other. It won't happen again."

The door closed with the softest click and four shocked faces were looking at it . After a moment of silence, Dumbledore spoke.

"Sirius, what you did is the most stupid and irresponsible thing that I have ever seen. I am very disappointed in you. You are banned from the Quidditch team, will spend the rest of this term helping Mr. Filch with the cleaning duties of the stables every single evening and I forbid you to even look in Mr. Snape's direction after you apologize to him for all that..."

"What?!" Asked the grey-eyed boy in shock and annoyance, interrupting the headmaster.

"Do not interrupt me, boy. I have been very lenient with all of you, but this is the last straw. Can't you see what could have happened had James arrived a second too late or not at all? Severus could have been turned, or killed! And Remus would have been found out and put down. You would have been sent to Azkaban for orchestrating someone's murder, regardless of your intention! Are you really that blinded by hate towards that poor boy?"

By the end of his speech, Dumbledore was seething. James and Remus were pale with fright when the weight of Sirius's actions downed on them, and Sirius, for the first time in his life, looked properly ashamed of himself.

"I'm sorry, headmaster. I-I won't ever target Snape again."

"It's not me the one you have to apologize to, boy. I don't want to hear another complaint related to any of you or Mr. Pettigrew, from fellow students or staff, including the house elves, or I'll have you suspended for how much it takes for all of you to learn this lesson. Is it understood?"

The three boys nodded, though Remus looked a bit reluctant.

"Headmaster?" Spoke the sandy-haired boy.

"Yes, my boy?"

"I... I don't think that I can keep myself away from Severus... Sir."

"What are you talking about, Mr. Lupin?"

"W-well, you see... I don't think that my... wolf... was trying to kill Severus..." Dumbledore raised an eyebrow.

"Mr. Lupin, I don't know what you think you are..."

"No, Sir, please. Let me explain..." Remus turned to look at his friends, a nervous expression on his face. From his bag took out a worn out book and gave it to the headmaster, open on a specific page. It looked so old that Dumbledore was afraid to even touch it.

When the headmaster finished reading, he turned to look at Remus and the sadness in the boy's eyes made him falter.

"Oh, my boy... How long..."

"I've suspected since I first laid eyes on him... He smelled different than any other guy... But his smell is still sweeter than any girl... I mean... I knew he was special when I met him... Yesterday night only made me confirm it."

James and Sirius looked at each other with confused expressions.

"But... How can it be possible for you to know this? It's supposed to happen until you turn seventeen..." The headmaster said.

"No... My instincts will compell me to claim him when I reach my magical maturity, and it will only happen when he is ready to... well... ah... to carry our pups..." Two shocked gasps were heard. "But I know it's him. That night... I wasn't trying to kill him... I was trying to... mark him... as mine." Remus's cheeks were tinted red, and all of a sudden James and Sirius understood what was being talked.

"Give him time, Remus. Let him heal from this trauma. I know it will be difficult for you to stay away from him, but I think it's the best, for now." The headmaster gave a sympathetic smile to the boy. "And you two, young men, must apologize and leave Severus alone. You may leave."

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James and Sirius promised to Remus to leave Severus alone, and even try to befriend him when the boy was ready to forgive them. James talked to his girlfriend, Lily, about what happened, and she gave them all a chastising that made Dumbledore's words pale in comparison. She stated that she wasn't defending her ex best friend, only remarking on their disregard for other people's lives... Even their own.

Somehow, Remus didn't think it wise to let Peter in on his secret, but he made him promise to keep away from Severus.

They were one week away from ending their sixth year and the only times in which they managed to catch a sight of Severus was during classes, otherwise the boy seemed to disappear into thin air. Remus looked for him with the Marauder's Map, and the boy went from the Slytherin common room to his classes in a straight line. They didn't even see him during meal times.

This bothered Remus quite a lot. It kept him in a state of constant worry due to the fact that his wolf sensed that something was wrong with his mate.

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During the train ride back home, Severus managed to secure one of the last compartments of the train for himself, successfully avoiding Potter and his cronies. After those stupid baboons finally left him alone, no one wanted to be close to him. He wasn't the laughing stock of the school any more anyway.

He gave up on trying to win Lily's friendship back since last Christmas, and the recent isolation that followed after THAT incident made him feel even more lonely and miserable. But everything would be good once he got home. He would be with his mother and they could talk and he'd get a job to start saving money for next term... He'd make sure to do well in all his subjects and get excellent grades, get a good job at the ministry and finally make enough money to take his mother away and leave the drunkard of his father. They would never see him again...

When Severus woke up, the train was entering King's Cross. He readied his few belongings into his rucksack and grabbed his trunk. He made sure to be of the last students to leave the train, he really didn't want to cross paths with either the marauders or Lily. He knew that no one would be waiting for him at the platform, so he quickly made his way towards the bus station.

It was a quick trip from London to the outskirts of Manchester, considering that it was almost night time, so, by the time he arrived to Spinner's End, the street was dead silent. He took the spare key from the loose floorboard at the entrance of his house and tried to be as quiet as possible, lest his father woke up and beat him up.

When he opened the door everything was in darkness, and a foul smell made it to his nose. It was awful, as if something had died and rotten there for months... Suddenly, a dark cold ran down his spine. He waited a few seconds to let his eyes adjust to the darkness and soon found the light switch. The room was a mess, there were broken bottles of beer everywhere, and some had brown stains on them.

Something screamed at his senses and he made a run towards the stairs. The wooden steps were covered in huge brown stains that had the shape of boots, and someone's bloodied fingerprints were dragged up the wall.

When Severus made it to the tiny top floor, the smell intensified, and he followed the biggest brown stain towards his parents' room. The door was locked, and a terrible fear soon gripped the lonely boy's heart.

By the time he managed to open the door, he was a wreck. Once he stepped inside he couldn't hold it down anymore. Histeria overpowered him at the sight of his mother's body thrown across the bed, lower parts naked and bloodied, and her throat sliced open. Her bloated, blue face still held an expression of extreme fear and pain. His father's body was besides her, pants down and cradling the dead woman. The man was on his stomach and his wrists were clogged with an awful amount of

dried blood.

His screams were heard two streets down the road, but he was not conscious of it until someone snapped him out of his shock. It was Mr. and Mrs. Snyder, the man was soon calling the police and the woman was steering him out of the house.

Everything was a blur. Ambulances and patrols came and went, people gathered around the house and the boy was finally transferred to an hospital.

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By the time Severus finally woke, all the events of last night came rushing back to him like a wave crashing on the land. He was alone, and his sobs of grief filled the silence in the room. Soon, a nice-looking woman entered the hospital room and started to talk sweetly to him, trying to calm him.

Without him noticing, another nurse came into the room and injected a sedative to his IV, and immediately fell back asleep.

The next time he woke he felt like someone had hit him in the head with a beater's bat. His brain was pounding inside his skull, his sight was still blurry and every little noise was torture.

He could make out a shadow next to him. It had the shape of a triangle glued to a stick. Then he felt a warm and delicate hand touch his.

"Severus, my boy..." It was McGonagall. The woman saw him wince with pain and muttered an apology.

"You've been unconscious for two days," whispered the woman, "your mother listed me as next of kin in case you needed someone and she was... Indisposed."

The teacher's voice sounded pained, and Severus remembered his predicament. He choked a sob and gently rubbed his eyes with the heel of his hand.

McGonagall didn't really know what to do. She was sorry for the boy, and his loss gave her heartache, but she couldn't figure out why Eileen Snape had named her next of kin in case young Severus needed someone. Surely his maternal family would be willing to take care of the boy...

"What... What happened with her body?" asked a teary-eyed Severus.

"The company your father worked for paid for your parents's burial. The funeral will be tomorrow." said the witch, extending her hand to wipe the boy's tears. "I have tried to contact your grandparents, but they..." she didn't know how to break the news to the boy.

"They don't care. They never did. My mother was disowned when she married my father, I know. They don't want to have anything to do with me nor I with them." the anger in Severus's voice was overwhelming.

After the silence stretched for too long, the boy finally spoke. "Do you think that I could be allowed to stay at Hogwarts for the holidays? I don't really want to go back home, and I don't have any other place to go... I could work in the castle and earn my keep... Or in Hogsmeade... I will need the money to pay for my school supplies... Oh god. What am I gonna do?"

The boy was almost hyperventilating. McGonagall assured him that she would speak with the headmaster regarding his situation. She couldn't yet understand why someone would leave a child

like Severus so defenseless... Of course she knew that the Prince family were proud purebloods, but to dismiss the death of one of their own so blatantly, and to say that the poor woman deserved to die like that... It was beyond her.

Through six years she had known Severus Snape as one to give as hard as he got. The boy was always so self reliant... And to see him crumbling before her was certainly too much.

Then a thought stroke her. What if this was the reason for Eileen to leave her only child in Minerva's hands? The clever girl knew that, under Minerva McGonagall's care, no child wold be left helpless.

Then and there the woman made it her mission to keep young Severus safe.

Chapter 2

After the funeral, time passed in a blur for Severus. He went with McGonagall to Hogwarts, where he was allowed to brew the potions for the hospital wing in exchange for food, roof and 5 galleons every two weeks.

McGonagall accompanied him to buy his school supplies, and was pleasantly surprised that he could buy brand new books and a new robe, and still have enough money to buy chocolate and extra potions books. But he knew he had to be careful, he had to save some money for the school year ahead.

"Professor... Do you think that I will still be allowed to brew potions and get paid?" asked the boy to the older witch.

"I honestly don't know, Severus. You were allowed to help because professor Slughorn is not used to work on holidays and the infirmary really needed the potions, but I'll see what I can do for you. Although if they don't allow you to continue once the school starts, you could probably work for the apothecary in Hogsmeade on the weekends. I'm sure they'll appreciate the help of a very talented young man such as yourself."

The witch smiled cheekily and winked at him... Oh gods! That woman was an angel!

When they entered Slugs & Jiggers, however, Severus's mood dropped. Inside the store were Potter and Black looking at the potions ingredients with mock disgust.

"Yuck Pads. I dare you to eat one of those slimi things." said Potter. Severus went to the furthest shelf, purposefully avoiding the pair of idiots.

"And what do I get for spoiling my appetite, Prongs?" asked the grey-eyed teen, looking a bit green in the face.

Severus grabbed a bottle and started inspecting it, hoping that the pair of baboons left the shop as soon as possible. However, he was so invested in the bottle that didn't notice when someone caged him between the shelf and a wall.

"He-hello, Severus... How have you been?" stuttered a very nervous, very happy Remus Lupin.

Severus gave a startled little yelp when he felt the other boy's hot breath hit his face. He tried to back away from Remus, but there was nowhere to go.

"W-what do you want, Lupin? Leave me alone." Severus tried to push past Remus, but only ended crashing against the other boy's chest. Whenever the fuck had Lupin grown so tall?

"To be honest, I wasn't sure I could get to see you today, but I was about to leave the shop when I

heard someone calling your name." Remus was rambling... "I thought it was your mother, but then I saw McGonagall entering with you and that was a surprise... You know, I don't think that I've ever met your mother, though I'd really like to meet her. I was hoping I could have met her today but it looks like..." Remus stopped short when a salty fragrance assaulted his nose. It was laced with sadness. "Severus? What's wrong?" asked the werewolf. There was worry etched in his voice, but Severus was so overwhelmed that he lashed out in an angry hiss to the other boy.

"Why would you want to meet my mother, Lupin? So that you and your stupid friends can laugh at her because she can't afford her son's supplies?" Severus wiped his tears quickly, so that the other boy couldn't see them. "So that you can gloat how you tried to kill the only person who cares for her and leave her alone? Or... Let me guess... To humiliate the both of us in the middle of Diagon Alley, so that the whole of Wizarding London can have laughing stock for at least a month? Wouldn't it be the greatest prank? I don't care how you and your stupid friends treat me, Lupin. But never in your miserable life dare to even think of my mother again, or there will be someone who finds their life threatened. It would be oh so bad if you accidentally ingested powdered silver... Wouldn't it?" Severus smirked. Remus blanched at his words, and he hoped that they were enough to keep him and his friends away.

He would never admit it out loud, but after Black's clever idea of sending him to a werewolf to get killed, he started fearing them. He knew he only had to endure this year and then he would be free of them.

Severus used that moment to break free from that situation, leaving the bottle in it's place and going through the shelves to pick his materials as quickly as he could.

He saw Potter and Black slip to the back of the shop and moments later leave with a weird looking Lupin on their tail. It was as if he looked sad... Probably his failure at engaging Severus in a public humiliation made him feel that way.

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Seventh year went by. Severus spent his weekends and holidays working for the apothecary in Hogsmeade. The owner, an old man with less teeth than hair, offered him an apprenticeship that was to begin right after he graduated from Hogwarts. He would keep his job, with the added bonus of food and roof and knowledge. He knew that he couldn't have done better, coming from a disowned mother and all that...

He tried his best to avoid The Marauders. Severus knew that they wanted to humiliate him at least once before they graduated, and he knew they wanted to make it grand. Those looks that Potter and Black kept sending his way made his skin crawl with fear, but he never showed any of it. Lupin, on the other hand, got very close to Lily Evans. Severus didn't really care about that, it's not like they were friends... But the thing that bothered him was that both of them seemed to be tracking him everywhere he went.

Three saturday mornings, Evans and Lupin set foot in the apothecary. The first time happened a week before the Halloween ball; Lily looked through the potions books boredly while Lupin loaded his hands with potions ingredients that Severus was sure the stupid werewolf didn't even have the slightest idea of what was their use. Lupin tried to chat with him about everything and nothing in particular, but upon receiving no answer but the charge of his purchase and his bag of ingredients almost thrown in his face, the amber-eyed boy left the shop in a hurry; Lily hot on his heels. Severus didn't bother leaving his room the day of the ball; he didn't want to risk being humiliated in front of the whole school... Again.

The second time happened two days before students left the castle for the winter holidays. Severus

could see Potter, Black, Lupin and Evans leave Honeydukes with bags full of candies. Then all of them stopped in front of the apothecary, Lupin glancing at Severus through the window. After what looked like a very heated discussion between Potter, Black and Evans, and a very nasty-looking hex shot from the redhead's wand, Lupin and the girl entered the place.

Lupin had the decency to look mortified, while Lily approached the stand and gingerly ordered Severus to go to the Christmas ball with the boy. How dare his ex best friend order him anything? She didn't have the right... And Severus told her as much, and as politely as he could. Lupin looked dejected, but Severus wasn't paying attention to the wolf, so he didn't care. Evans and Severus got engaged in a staring match that promplty ended as McGonagall entered the place and chastised Lily for daring to perturb Severus in his job. The woman deducted 50 points from Gryffindor for harassing a student, and took both Lupin and Evans back to the castle with her.

Of course McGonagall spent the summer holidays getting to know Severus better, and the boy found it all too easy to confide in her. He told her why he and Lily were no longer friends, why the marauders always targeted him, and why he feared them. Severus made the older witch promise that she wouldn't say a word to the headmaster; Severus knew that families as powerful as the Blacks, Potters and Lupins could make him 'shut up' for good with none being the wiser, and that his own family, the Princes, would do nothing. It was their word against his... So, the witch took it upon herself to end the bullying against him.

On Christmas day Severus found at the foot of his bed a box wrapped in Gryffindor colors. Obviously it was from McGonagall. The box contained three chocolate frogs, pumpkin pasties, chocolate cauldrons and the best quality of chocolate mint bars. He discarded the box, not noticing that inside still layed a carefully folded letter with his name on it. Later that day, during lunch, an owl delivered a parcel next to his breakfast. He thoroughly checked it for curses and whatnot, opening it avidly when he made sure the package was clean. It was an old potions journal. It looked so old that some pages were torn here and there. Severus turned to the head table and McGonagall winked at him from her place next to Dumbledore.

That night during the ball, neither Lupin nor Evans dared to approach him, thank Merlin.They were dancing and twirling like stupids while he was bussy trying to stuff all that ancient knowledge regarding potions inside his brain. McGonagall had made him promise to attend, but he never said anything about socializing; and after two hours of silly carols, food and uncomfortable glitter that somehow made it into his boxers, he left the great hall, unaware of the amber eyes following him through the grand doors.

The third and last time happend just before the Hogwarts Express left for the summer holydays. Everyone was going back home, the seventh years to never return... at least as students... and that meant that Severus would finally be free of his tormentors.

He wasn't boarding the train. That very same day his apprenticeship with Master Cecile Pettyfer began. Severus was happily dusting the shelves and cleaning the delicate bottles by hand when the door to the apothecary opened. In came Lily Evans and Remus Lupin, both sporting serious expressions on their faces.

"Severus... may I talk to you, please?" asked the werewolf. His tone was so meek compared to his usual deep, cheerful voice.

"What do you want, Lupin?" Said Severus, leaving his task and turning to look at the pair before him.

"In private, if you will..." Severus arched an eyebrow.

"What makes you think that I would willingly agree to be left alone with you, Lupin? Say what you came to tell me and leave. I haven't got all day." The sandy-haired boy flinched at the ice of Severus's words. Lily, on the other hand, was starting to lose her patience.

"Severus I... I just wanted to apologize for all that me and my friends put you through all these years... I know that I don't deserve it, because... it doesn't really matter if I never actively participated, I never did anything to stop them... We were cruel to you and that night in the shrieking shack was just too much... but please... I beg you... please, Severus... Forgive me... I... I would very much like to start anew..." Remus moved to take Severus's hands between his, but the raven-haired boy caught the gesture and batted the strange hands away.

"Well, well, well... I didn't think that you'd stoop so low for a joke... Tell me, Lupin. How much are your friends paying you for trying to trick me into believing your false words?" Severus hissed. How dare that stupid wolf think that he would fall for his meaningless words?

"No... Severus I swear it's not a joke! I sincerely apologize... Please, Severus... Give me one more chance to prove you that I can be a good friend! Please!" Lupin was on the verge of crying, and something inside Severus's mind and heart clicked... The apology and the begging... it was all too similar to how he tried to apologize to Lily for calling her a... that awful word.

"Get out. I don't want to listen to you any longer." Severus started to walk towards the back door when Lily's voice made him freeze.

"He's begging you, Snape. He recognizes his mistakes and he's willing to start over. Don't be such a rightgeous prat and leave him standing here..." Severus's blood boiled. He turned around so fast that he was surprised he didn't trip.

"So I'm a rightgeous prat for not accepting a goddamned apology for almost six years of heavy bullying and a murder attempt against my person, but I don't deserve forgiveness for calling someone a mudblood when I was under pressure because I was being humiliated in front of the whole fucking school, despite waiting for said person for over six months outside their common room trying to apologize for one stupid mistake and humiliating myself further? Then what does that make you, Evans? You said we were going to be friends forever, but one slip of the tonge on my part while I was being bullied by your boyfriend and you discard me like an old dirty rag..." Severus's voice started to crack and tears were starting to blur his vision, but he didn't care... he needed this. "I thought that you would at least come to my parents's funeral out of the so called respect that you said you had for my mother... but you and your family didn't even bother to send your condolences... So no. I cannot accept Lupin's apology, Evans, out of self respect... And if I were you, Lupin, I'd be careful with her. She discards people as soon as they are no longer useful to her. Now get out of here, you've wasted enough of my time. I hope to never cross paths with you again."

Severus could see how much his words affected both boy and girl in a different manner. While Lily's face showed first anger, then shame and finally sadness and hurt, Lupin's became stoic; but Severus knew that expression very well, cause he had worn it many times... Lupin's face became the very image of heartbreak... as if someone was piercing his heart with a silver spade. But at the end of his speech, Severus couldn't give a damn about them. They were two of the people who hurt him the most and he sincerely hoped to never see them again; so he turned around and closed the door to the brewing room behind him, waiting for the two intruders to leave.

Encounters

Master Potioneer Cecile Pettyfer turned out to be excelent teacher, and even an excelent father figure for Severus. The man was patient, and always found ways to make the boy feel wanted and loved.

The first time the old man's family came to visit, Severus offered to stay at the Three Broomsticks, so that the family could have their privacy, but even the little kids refused to let him go, thus including him in all their activities and making Severus feel, for the first time in his life, that he belonged somewhere... That he had a family.

At 20, Severus presented his Mastery exam, approving with flying colors, becoming the youngest potions master in history. Minerva McGonagall and Cecile Pettyfer threw a party in his honor: Cecile's family, shop keepers and some villagers came to celebrate Severus's achievement, succeding in making him cry happy tears for the first time in his life.

At 21, he was approached by Lucius Malfoy, seeking a cure for his infant son who suffered from a rare blood curse. While the Healers and Severus worked hand to hand to cure little Draco, Lucius tried to tempt Severus with riches inimaginable and power beyond limits, if he just joined Lord Voldemort's crusade to bring the magical world to it's former glory once more. Severus was many things, but not stupid, so he candidly told Malfoy to leave him out of that mess if he wanted his precious Draco to survive. Something told Severus that he was better off not asociating himself with Malfoy, or anyone participating in the self-proclaimed Dark Lord's crusade.

At 22, Master Cecile Pettyfer died, leaving a bleeding wound in Severus's heart that refused to heal. The Pettyfers were rich, and most of them lived scattered across the globe; those few that remained in England knew nothing of potions, so they all decided to respect Cecile's last will and testament, where he named one Severus Snape as the only heir and owner of Pettyfer's Quality Potions.

At 23, Severus was quite the renowned potions master in all England. He was the youngest and most talented potioneer of the century... problably of history, thus building a positive reputation alongside a small fortune thanks to the high quality of his work. His name was no longer said with disgust or pity, and he even rejoiced in rejecting the Prince family. They discarded him and his mother like filth, and he loved to show them how wrong they were.

At 24, he was awarded with his first Potions Masters' Guild Award for his contribution to new uses of 24 potions ingredients, resulting in the creation of the Wolfsbane Potion. The Ministry of Magic provided him with a monthly stipend to supply the potion to those werewolves living amongst humans. The Wolfsbane proved to be a success, eliminating the number of people who died or were bitten by raging werewolves during the full moon. That's how Severus found himself one September morning face to face with Remus Lupin and Sirius Black.

"What are you doing in my shop? Get out immediately." said Severus in barely a whisper.

"Now, now, Snape... That's no way to treat a customer..." said Black in a condescending tone. "Besides, we won't be long. We just want a dose of your famous potion. My dear Remus here wants to give it a go..."

Remus hadn't said a word. He couldn't. His brain had gotten engaged in Severus's last words seven years ago... His heart was breaking anew and he was afraid that if he opened his mouth, the only thing that would come out of it would be a suffering wail and another humiliating begging for forgiveness. He couldn't do that to Severus, specially not in front of Sirius.

Sirius was still angry at Severus for breaking and rejecting Remus that he promised to all his friends that, even if it wast the last thing he did, he would get Remus his happily ever after with the greasy git.

"Here it is, now get out." said Severus while shoving a bottle of Wolfsbane towards Sirius, who moved to get Severus his money. "Keep your money, Black. The Ministry pays for it. Now get out of my shop." Sirius smirked and all but dragged Remus out of the place. Remus kept staring at Severus the whole time they were there like a thirsty man stares at a glass of water, only stopping when the door of the apothecary was closed on his face.

Once his ex-bullys left, Severus let loose his mask. He was shivering all over, as if someone had blown cold wind against his neck. It was an unsettling feeling. Somehow, deep down he knew that Black and Lupin coming back after seven years was not a coincidence; he could only pray to the gods to keep him from harm and away from the marauders.

Once he gathered his wits, he started to craft a ward that forbade Lupin and Black, specifically, to enter his shop again.

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On his 25th birthday, Severus received a very curious package delivered by owl. It was not a regular post owl; this little fellow was a Bubo bengalensis. Severus was sure that he had seen this pecular owl somewhere before, but he couldn't remember exactly where or when.

He checked the package. It turned out clean of curses and hexes, and Severus immediately undid the shrinking charm. It was a medium sized box with an extension charm placed on the inside. It contained boxes of different varieties of chocolate, including a special colection of chocolate mint snacks; two very ancient-looking books in latin and gaelic, one about potions and the other about herbology that, to Severus's delight, were written a millenia ago. There were also several books about muggle literature, including Severus's favourite authors and two silk robes, both were black and looked very expensive.

Severus didn't know who sent the package, but it was clear that Minerva McGonagall couldn't have sent it; for one, the robes probably costed what she earned in a monthly salary each; so she couldn't have afforded two. Then there were the books; She didn't even know who his favorite author was; she respected muggles, but she absolutely despised their literature, so no.

He didn't spend much time thinking about it, because he had an appointment with Minerva to have breakfast together in her office in Hogwarts. Since he graduated, Minerva and him spent their birthdays together, occasionally joined by Albus Dumbledore. He didn't like the headmaster , but if suffering his company for the day was a way to ensure Minerva's friendship,, he would endure it.

Severus dressed in the nicest, cleaniest slacks and shit he had, draping one of his new robes over

his narrow shoulders. He usually didn't bother to look presentable, but he wanted to impress Minerva. It's not that he liked her in a more than friendly way... It's just that Minnie had become more like his mother figure since he lost his own mother. The woman was there when he graduated, she even cry and made Severus cry by telling him how full of pride he made her feel. She made him feel loved and protected and wanted, just like the Pettyfer family, when the rest of his teachers and classmates, and even his supposed best fiend turned their backs on him, only daring to look his way when he was being humiliated.

When Severus arrived to Hogwarts, McGonagall was already waiting for him with a slice of fruit cake and a mug of hot cocoa. It was an early January morning, so the weather was still very chilly. Dumbledore arrived shortly after, seating himself comfortably next to Severus in the sofa.

"Severus, my boy, how have you been? I haven't seen much of you this year." Said the old man. Severus tried to rearrange himself on his seat to back away from the headmaster, but the old man reached his bony hands and grabbed his shoulders, forcing him into an uncomfortable hug that lasted a good 30 seconds, impregnating Severus's new robe with Dumbledore's distinct scent... Patchouly and vanilla...

After a nice breakfast and enjoyable conversation, Severus excused himself. He had to go to Diagon Alley to buy some dragonhide gloves. He bid his farewell to Minerva and kissed her on the cheek, but was careful to avoid the headmaster's grabby hands... The old man was acting weirder than usual; he was never so touchy-feely or effusive of generally nice towards him... Maybe he ate too much lemon drops before coming...

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"Do you think that he received the package I sent him?" Asked a very nervous Remus Lupin to a very bored James Potter.

"I'm sure he did, Moony." Answered the man, he wasn't really paying attention to his nervous friend. It was a very chilly monday morning in Wizarding London, and the Potters, their son, Sirius and Remus were having a nice stroll through the Alley.

Lily and Sirius were walking behind them talking animatedly when all of a sudden they heard a soft 'pop' come from the little alley between two shops. James Potter and Sirius black shoved Lily, who was holding her three year old baby, and Remus behind them; taking their wands out, both Aurors approached the alley and James subtly casted a revealing charm designed to reveal the dark mark on people. No one could be cautious enough when it came to the security of their loved ones.

The charm revealed nothing, so it must've been a normal civilian. Remus stopped in his tracks when he smelled a distinct aroma. He was about to come forward and greet the old headmaster of Hogwarts when out came none other than Severus Snape.

Remus froze in his spot, Potter and Black blinked at him like a pair of retards and Lily subtly gasped.

"S-Severus... How long... Happy Birthday!" Said Evans... no... Potter, now. She stepped forward and arranged her grabby-handsy child in one arm to try to hug him with the other, but he quickly moved out of her reach. A look of hurt crossed her lovely face.

"Thank you, Mrs. Potter. Have a good day. Gentlemen." Severus inclined his head in a recognizing gesture, then turned around and left.

He was quickly walking towards Madame Malkin's, trying to put as much distance between Potter's

gang and himself when a hand suddenly grabbed his arm and stopped him abruptly. He turned around, wand drawn, only to find Lupin looking at him with the strangest expression on his face.

"I said, good day. Would you mind letting go of my appendage, Mr. Lupin? I have an appointment in five minutes." Said Severus while trying to yank his arm free from Lupin's tight grip.

"I-I tried to visit you in your shop a few times... you know... j-just to grab my potion... but I c-couldn't. Later I received a message from the M-Ministry telling me that my potion was going to be delivered by a Ministry Post Owl, like the rest of... of my kind..." Remus's grip tightened and Severus flinched. "Why do you smell like Dumbledore?"

Lupin's eyes were starting to glow amber, and Severus felt fear start to invade him at the growl the other unconsciously let out.

"Lupin let go of me this instant..." Said Severus in a panicked voice, trying to free himself from the werewolf. Remus was not conscious of what he was doing, he could only imagine why Severus smelt like the headmaster, and it was doing nothing to control his jealousy.

Remus advanced until the tips of his shoes were touching Severus's; until he was looking down upon the dark-haired man, towering above him. He could see the fear in the dark eyes and hear his heart arrithmically beat. Then it clicked in his brain that it was him who was making Severus tremble with barely concealed panic. Remus let him go.

Severus stumbled a few steps back and cradled his arm next to his chest.

"W-what the hell is wrong with you, Lupin?! Don't you ever dare to come any closer to me..." Hissed Severus angrily. Remus gave one step towards him and Severus gave five more backing away from him.

Potter and Black grabbed one of Remus's arms each and whispered to him, trying to calm him.

"Keep your pets leashed, Potter. You don't want people to confuse them with the rogue ones, do you?" James glared at Severus but didn't say a word. Sirius had positioned himself in front of Remus, effectively blocking his way if he attempted to get to Severus, and still kept whispering things to him. Lily could do nothing but watch things unfold; her child was happily giggling and babbling while looking at Severus and trying to reach out to him.

Severus turned around, intent on getting to Madam Malkin's as soon as possible when a child's high pitched giggle and a very defined "Sev'us" reached his ears and made him stop once again.

All the adults turned to look at the happy baby, surprised that he had said the dark man's name almost correctly, and then they turned to look at Severus. He frowned at the child, looked at Lily one last time, and resumed his way, leaving the others behind.

Once Severus was out of sight, Remus allowed himself to crumble to the floor.

"Guys... I-I don't know if I will be able to keep myself away from him any longer..." Said the werewolf in a very dejected tone.

"What do you mean?" Asked James.

"He's ripe..." Said Remus, while an angry blush flushed his cheeks. Lily gasped.

"What? What do you mean?" Asked James and Sirius at the same time.

"Remus means that Severus is ready to carry Moony's kids..." intervened Lily.

James and Sirius looked at each other.

"Well..." said Sirius. "At least he was wearing one of the robes you sent him."

Re-encounters

A week before Severus turned 26, Dumbledore visited him in his little apothecary, followed by Minerva McGonagall. They both were throwing cautious glances at each other and something inside Severus told him that their visit could not be good.

"Speak." snapped the Potions Master. Both man and woman flinched at his tone, but soon decided that it was in their best interest to say what they came to say.

"Severus, I know what the relationship between you and Mr Potter and his friends is like..." started the old headmaster, but halted a bit when he saw Severus's eyes narrow. "but I think it's time to let old grudges go. Leave the past in the past, dear boy, and look forward."

"Let my grudges go..." whispered Severus. "Tell me, headmaster... if it had been you, all those years ago, trying desperately not to be eaten by a ravenous beast, humiliated beyond your breaking point, and abandoned by the person you hold dear the most... would you still suggest that I let go?" Dumbledore couldn't hold Severus's gaze. The fact that he had always deliberately ignored Severus's pain didn't need to be said, but it hung in the air like a putrid smell.

"Severus, please..." begged McGonagall. "We know how much harm they did to you, but I promise that they won't harm you again." Severus was about to turn and leave them alone, but McGonagall's expression made him stop.

The old witch glanced briefly towards the headmaster and immediately returned her gaze to Severus. "Remus Lupin, Sirius Black, Lily and James Potter applied this year to become professors at Hogwarts, and... surprisingly enough, all of them were chosen by the board of governors." Severus tensed all over. "Mr. Lupin will be covering Ancient Runes, Mr. Black will be the new Transfigurations teacher, Mrs. Potter will be the new Arithmancy teacher and Mr. Potter will be the new DADA teacher. They will start this term as assistant professors to the head teachers while they get used to dealing with teaching and its dealings. Next term they will become the head professors for their assigned subjects."

Severus's brain refused to register what the witch had just told him. There was absolutely no way that those idiots were comming back to ruin all that he worked so hard to earn! This was not fair!

"Severus!" Someone had clasped his arm in a tight grip and it was starting to hurt.

"I refuse." Said the black-haired man. Dumbledore just looked at him with something akin to pity in his eyes. "I will not stand here waiting for them to come and ruin all that I've worked so hard to get!"

Severus got out of the counter and all but ran to the front door, opening it and motioning the old witch and wizard to leave. They did so, and Severus closed and locked the door behind them.

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Remus Lupin had a good opinion of himself. He knew that he was handsome, moderately rich, kind, strong, and very, very patient. That's why he was equally ashamed and surprised when he found himself outside Severus's Apothecary after promising McGonagall that he wouldn't hunt Severus down barely a week ago..

It was the first Hogsmeade weekend since students came back from winter break, and the first Hogsmeade weekend that he spent as a member of Hogwarts's faculty. He had been waiting all week for this day... for this moment... when he would finally get to spend some time with his mate... only to find that said mate had closed off his business and run away.

"I... I don't understand, Lily... Why... Why would he run away?" Asked the werewolf to his redheaded best friend. Lily could only look at him with sadness in her eyes.

"I don't know Rem. But I promise that we'll find him and bring him back." A lone tear escaped the werewolf's eyes as he turned and smiled to his friend and to the five-year-old boy she carried in her arms.

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A week before the students left for summer break, the apothecary in Hogsmeade opened again. Remus had promised to his friends that he would wait at least until the last student was on the train to go and confront Severus about his disappearance. He was honestly keeping to his promise, but on Friday afternoon - the day before the students were scheduled to leave, little Harry came to him asking for some chocolate, since his mother had denied him some before eating actual food. He didn't have any chocolate on hand, he soon realized, and who was he to deny a poor, chocolate addicted, little child? So Remus took it upon himself to find little Harry some chocolate.

Both boys were headed to Honeydukes when out of the corner of his eyes Remus caught a glimpse of a black cloak. He turned around so fast that little Harry collided with his legs.

"Severus..." whispered the werewolf upon seeing the man he was so looking forward to see.

Severus Snape looked like a vision. His hair had grown a lot - it now reached the middle of his back. Long, dark strands of black, velvety hair fell upon his face, but it was Severus Snape nonetheless.

Remus had never seen him smile since the incident from the Shrieking Shack... Even before, the only person he rarely smiled to was Lily. Minerva once told him that the only time Severus had allowed her to see him smile, yet alone hear him laugh, was the day he received his Mastery in Potions, and only after a heartfelt cry and a tankard (It was common knowledge amongst the oldest members of the Faculty at Hogwarts that Severus Snape, for all his seriousness and bad attitude, couldn't hold his alcohol very well and became a giggling schoolboy).

So, to see him there, at the entrance to his apothecary, smiling sweetly to a stranger while holding the other man's hand for more time than was considered polite for a goodbye handshake filled him with confusing feelings: His human personality couldn't see beyond the beautiful smile plastered on Severus's face, cause it made him fall in love even harder; while the wolf howled with rage at the stranger, wanting to rip his hand away and get rid of him in a very painful and bloody way.

Remus Lupin, for once in his life, didn't know what to do... But all thought left his mind when he saw little Harry pulling on Severus's cloak trying to get his attention. Remus didn't miss the annoyed and disgusted face the stranger made when he saw Harry, but praised the Lord above when the man hastily let go of Severus's hand and apparated away.

Severus went very pale when he saw the child. It was no doubt who was this little miscreant... with those eyes and that hair... The dark man tried to remove the fastidious child from his cloak and go back to his store as fast as he could when he caught sight of Remus Lupin comming his way, but the little demon wouldn't let go... and he had sticky hands...

"Sevewus!" Yelled little Harry "Sevewus! cawy me!" The little boy extended his tiny arms towards the tall man, bouncing on his little feet.

Severus had no idea how the little kid knew his name, but he was oh so not going to carry the snotball. He was walking backwards towards his shop, trying to escape the kid, but the child was relentless, and Severus soon found himself being tackled to the floor with a lap full of little baby Harry.

The child was soon cradling Severus's hollow cheeks between his sticky hands, giggling while pushing Severus's cheeks together and forcing the sour man to make funny faces; all while said sour man was stunned into shock by the little boy's actions.

Soon, Severus was released from his torture by none other than Remus Lupin, who pulled a giggling Harry towards him and offered his hand to help Severus stand up.

"I'm sorry, Severus. As soon as Harry saw you, he let go of my hand and ran away." Remus was proud of himself, he had managed to not stutter like an idiot in front of his beloved.

Remus's hand was still extended, and Severus was looking at it with disgust. Severus crawled a few steps backwards and stood up as far away from Lupin as his position between the werewolf and the door to his shop allowed.

"Get away from me, Lupin. And make sure that this... child... never molests me again." The dark haired man turned around and started to open the door when an explosion behind them caught his attention.

He felt himself being thrown against the door and falling to the floor because of the force of the explotion. Then, he heard little Harry cry out Remus's name in desperation.

Severus was a bit disoriented, but soon found the strenght to turn back to where the child was wailing and found caos all around him. Shops were being burnt, people was running away and hexes and spells were being thrown to and from.

The weather dropped considerably and the sky darkened. He could hear someone yelling a strange spell and green light shot from the middle of the chaos and towards the sky. He felt a cold wind seep though his bones when he saw the figure that appeared in the sky: A skull with a serpent comming out of its mouth...

The piercing cry of a desperate child brought him back to reality. Harry's little hands and part of his clothes were covered in blood; Remus Lupin was face down on the floor and a big puddle of blood was forming under him. Severus panicked.

By the third time Harry yelled Remus's name, the dark haired man lifted the child in his arms and checked for vital signs on Lupin's pulse point. He was still alive, but there was not much time left.

Severus searched for his wand and quicly dismantled the wards that prevented any of the marauders inside his shop, leaving only the one that burned the dark mark on anyone who possessed it that dared to cross his threshold. He levitated the unconscious man and carried the child inside.

There was a trail of blood following Lupin, and soon Severus realized that someone had shot Lupin with a piercing hex. Severus started pouring potion after potion down the man's throat, after placing little Harry next to Lupin's head once he got him to the counter.

Once Lupin was out of risk, Severus spelled Harry's clothes and hands clean and sent his patronus to Hogwarts, letting Lupin's friends know what had happened and where little Harry was.

After the chaos outside seemed to die down, Severus could hear a sharp hiss coming from the door. There, barely on the threshold, stood Lucius Malfoy, clutching his left arm in pain.

"Consider this a favor for saving my child's life, Snape." whispered the blond man. "The Dark Lord was far from pleased when you rejected his gracius invitation to join his crusade. He ordered one of us to give you a... warning..." the man's eyes strayed to where Lupin and the kid were. Harry was hiding behind Severus, just showing enough of his little face from behind the dark man. "He has reports that you've been friendly with his enemies. Be careful, Snape. If he doesn't have your talents at his disposition, he'll make sure that no other has them either." With one last look at the unconscious man, Lucius Malfoy apparated away.

With a wave of his hand, Severus closed the door, and with another, the blood that was on the floor vanished. When he turned around, he soon found himself with an armful of little Harry, who was still crying.

Severus didn't know what to do, so he just hugged the child to his chest, whispering little things into his hair to try to calm him, while erecting a monitoring ward arount the werewolf.

By the time James Potter & Co. banged the door to his apothecary open, Harry had fallen asleep in Severus's arms - one tiny fist chutching Severus's robe and the fingers of the other into his mouth.

Lily approached him and he handed over her child, while explaining to Dumbledore what had happened and retelling what Lucius Malfoy had told him earlier.

Sirius and James returned to Hogsmeade. They were both professors at Hogwars, yes, but they were still on duty for the Auror corps.Severus opened his floo connection to let Madame Pomfrey take Remus directly to the hospital wing. Lily and Dumbledore followed though; and once Severus closed and warded his shop, followed after them.

Chapter 5

Two weeks had passed since the attack on Hogsmeade, and Severus was feeling a bit paranoid. He had no idea who Lucius was talking about, unless he refered to McGonagall... But then again, Lucius knew that McGonagall was like the mother his own never was. If there was anyone on this earth deserving of his loyalty, that would be the tartan-loving woman. No one else.

On the third week, Nick Eckhart visited him. Severus had met him during his trip to Lincolnshire. The man was the only wizard living in a small comunity of religious muggles and enjoyed playing tricks on them, making them believe that their town was cursed. For the most part, Eckhart seemed to be harmles, but it stroke as curious to Severus that wnehever he invited the other man to come into his shop for some tea, he would refuse and make a hasty retreat.

The door to his apothecary opened, ringing the little bell, but Severus was so lost in his thoughts that he didn't hear it and was startled when a hand reached out to snap fingers in front of his face.

"Black... what are you doing here?" Asked Severus a little confused. He was sure that he renewed the wards that kept the marauders away from his shop...

"I don't like to be here either, Snape. I'm just here because of Remus." Severus arched an eyebrow in question. "He wants to see you."

"Well, I don't want to see him, so you can leave already and tell your little mutt to not bother you again." Sirius's anger reflected in his eyes. It was clear that he was struggling to stay calm.

"Listen, Snape, if it were for me, I wouldn't have come. I even tried convincing Remus that having you near him is a bad idea. But for some unfathomable reason he wants to see you. It's been three weeks since the attack on Hogsmeade and he's barely recovered. He woke up barely four days ago. If you forgot, the blast he received was aimed at you, so the least you could do to thank him blocking that goddamned hex from you is grant him his stupid wish and go see him!" By the end of his speech, Sirius was practically yelling at Severus.

Severus was no stupid. He knew that whether he liked it or not, he now owed a life debt to Remus Lupin, and he didn't like to owe people anything; so, considering it better, he decided to go.

"Very well. I will go see him. I shall be there after closing my shop."

Sirius sighed. He knew that this was as good as he was going to get, but he promised Remus that he would make Snape go to see him... He had to make it up to Remus for what happened that night so long ago...

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Severus arrived to Hogwarts at 7:30 pm. He first went to visit McGonagall, but didn't find her in

her office. Severus's second option was to go ask the headmaster where Minerva was, but somehow being alone with the old fool unnerved him. He still didn't trust him despite the man's efforts to be civil and caring for Severus. He just new that at any moment the old man would turn his back on him in favour of his golden Griffindors.

Instead, Severus decided to go directly to the hospital wing, where he found Lupin's bed surrounded by his friends and little Harry perched on his side, playing with a stuffed wolf. Upon entering, the child was the fist one to notice his presence, thus creaming his name with glee followed by a high-pitched squeal.

"Sevewus! Sevewus! Your are here!" The little boy got down from the bed and ran to Severus, locking his little arms around the tall man's legs. Severus was surprised by the child's actions.

"Let go." He deadpanned, and little Harry tilted his head up to look at him.

"Sevewus! I missed you!" exclaimed the child, tightening his lock on the man's legs. "Moony misses you too! He was asking fow you all the days!" Harry let go of Severus's legs and took his hand. All the adults watched perplexed - including Severus himself - as the little boy dragged the dark man to Remus's bed while Harry kept babbling.

"... and Remus says that he going to buy me lots and lots of chocolate fow being a good boy! Do you wants some of my chocolate Sevewus? I know that you like chocolate and mint. Remus likes it too!" kept saying the little boy.

Once they reached Remus's bedside, James, Remus and Lily excused themselves to go somewhere else. Lily reached for her child, to grab him from Remus's bed, where he had climbed back and possitioned himself on the man's lap.

"Awww mummy! But Sevewus just came! Pwease let me stay with Sevewus!" whined the baby. Remus chuckled but a fit of coughing assaulted him. Sirius moved to press a glass of water to his friend's lips.

"I'm sorry, baby, but Severus came to visit your uncle Moony." Said James. "I'm sure Severus will come other time to play with you." Severus frowned, clearly rejecting that idea with his mere facial expression. "Or when your uncle Moony gets better he can take you to visit Severus." Now Severus was downright scowling. His cheeks started to flush with anger and Lily was prompt to remove everyone from the place, lest Severus exploded and left without even aknowledging Remus.

She knew that Severus showing up was a start on building something between him and Remus, and it was her second top priority to see her friends together. After that awful last day of school in seventh year, Lily had thought long and hard about Severus's words, making her realize that, indeed, she had been unfair with Sev, and that she deserved what the boy had told her; but nothing of what happened was Remus's fault, so she made a decision then and there: she would get Severus's friendship back, took what it took, and she would help Remus get his mate at all costs.

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Once Lupin's friends had vacated the hospital area, an upset Harry in tow, Severus moved to stand at the feet of Remus's bed. "Well, I'm here, Lupin. You sent your loathsome friend to bully me into comming and here I am. What do you want?"

Severus's words hurt. They were cold and conveyed the annoyance Severus felt at being here, but Remus couldn't afford to feel insulted. Sirius had made Severus come to see him, albeit reluctantly, and he wasn't going to waste his chance to get closer to the man... figuratively speaking.

"Severus, I'm glad to see you." Remus whispered. He tried to sit on his bed, but winced at the pain that shot from his shoulder to his neck and arm. Severus raised an eyebrow at seeing his reaction, but didn't move to help.

"Well, I'm not. If you haven't got anything important to tell me, then I kindly advice you to stop wasting my time. I haven't got it to lose on you. Good day." Severus turned to leave. He gave a fuck if he owed the man his life, he didn't want to be here alone with him. Somehow, being near Lupin under what could be considered normal circumstances made him feel weird. Specially taking into account the way Remus was looking at him. It was the same puppy eyes he had when he encountered him in the potions shop that day many years ago.

Severus remembered the way he felt when Remus caged him between himself and the wall, while looking at him like a hungry dog looks at a raw steak, and he shivered. Yep, he really shouldn't have come.

"Severus, please. Don't go. I really want to talk to you." Said Remus in a weak voice. Severus stopped in his tracks. He really shouldn't have come. Severus sighed.

"Listen, Lupin. I only came because I know that I owe you my life, but don't expect me to be grateful. It's the least you could have done - even if you weren't aware of it- after years and years of bullying and a murder attempt. I don't care what stupid ideas you and your friends have about me. I'm still me, and I still hate you all. I don't know how or why Potter's child knows my name, but you better tell him that I have nothing to do with him and make it clear to all of them that I. Don't. Want. Any .Of. You. Anywhere. Near. Me!" Severus poked Remus every time to remark his words. "I don't know why all of you came back, but you better not cross paths with me again. I will repay my debt in due time, Lupin, but in the mean time, I want NOTHING to do with you or your friends." Severus whirled around and was ready to storm out of the hospital wing when a surprisingly strong hand on his wrist made him spin on his heels and stop.

"Please, Severus. Just listen to me. I... I know that you don't like me... us... but at least on my part I am really sorry for what we did to you. I just want to start over... I... I don't like to be just another person walking down the street for you. I want to be more! I want to be your b... friend. At least an acquaintance... Please Severus..." Severus was trying to free his arm thoughout Lupin's speech. The man's hold on him was strong despite him being so weak.

"I told you that I don't want to have anything to do with you or your friends, Lupin! Now let go of my arm!" Severus kept struggling against Remus's hold, but the werewolf wouldn't budge. Severus once again whirled arould to leave, but Remus's strong grip on him tightened and the man pulled him towards the bed. Severus tripped and landed on top of Remus, his head on the other man's chest. Remus immediately put his arm around Severus's waist, holding him in place, his other hand went to tangle in the long, black locks of hair.

"Lupin! let go this instant!" cried a very flustered Severus.

"Not until you listen to me." Severus kept struggling, but then stopped when he felt that every time, Remus tightened his hold on him. When the fuck had Lupin moved his legs in between Severus's?

Severus stilled and gave a resigned sigh.

"Make it quick, Lupin. I haven't got all day." Said Severus in a tired voice. Remus inhaled the perfume emmanating from Sev's hair and gave a contented sigh. He honestly didn't believe that he could ever hold his mate this close to his body... If only this had happened in onther circumstances...

"Severus, do you remember the apology I gave you the last day of school?" Severus grunted in response. Lupin's caresses were making him drowsy. "I really meant every word. I want to start over, Severus. I really want to be your friend. I know I don't have any right to ask you to forgive me for all that we did to you in the past, but I'm willing to make up for it and earn your trust and your friendship. I honestly want to be your friend, Severus. Please... Allow me to try." Remus kept the gentle scratching of his hair, while moving his hand up and down his back, making him drowsy.

Severus didn't know what to say, but something in the way Remus was holding him and the way his words sounded so honest and eager to become true made him falter in his resolve to keep the marauders away from him. Deep down, Severus knew that that night in the shrieking shack wasn't Lupin's fault, and that the man had never actively participated in any humilliation his other two best friends deemed he deserved. Maybe Lupin wasn't a saint, but neither was he. Still, he couldn't forgive seven years of constant insults and humiliation, of hexes and curses thrown his way without anyone stopping the abuse.

But there was something in the way Lupin was holding him that made him feel safe and gave him a strange sense of belonging... Severus got scared. He tried to push away from Remus, but the sandy-haired man kept him in place and shushed him, pleading for him to stay where he was.

The man's hands caressing him felt so good and made him all warm and fuzzy, exacerbating Severus's fear, but some minutes later, Remus managed to calm him down enough so that Severus stopped struggling and unconsciously burrowed himself into Remus's chest.

"I... I accept your apology, Lupin... but we can't be friend...." Whispered Severus in a very vulnerable tone.

"Why not?" whispered Remus in the same tone.

"Because... Because you will hurt me again... one way or another... I know..." said Severus in a hushed, tired voice before falling asleep on top of a bittersweet Remus Lupin. Remus sighed; he knew that he had to convince Severus of his good intentions, but for now he felt satisfied... at least Severus had accepted his apology... Remus summoned a quilt from the other bed and pulled it to cover Severus and himself with it.

Two hours had gone by since Remus was left alone with Severus. The dark man was still sleeping on top of him and Remus was enjoying every second of it.

The first one to descover them was Madame Pomfrey, who had all the intention to shoo Severus out of her infirmary in order to let Remus recover in peace, but the werewolf gave her a pleading look and a few mouthed words, and the mediwitch let them be. The second one to catch them was Sirius. At first the animagus was shocked into silence at the scene in front of him: Snape sleeping on top of his best friend and Remus looking like a stupid lovesick idiot (forgive the repetition...), but then recovered and just made a zipping motion with his fingers over his mouth and left the place with a winning grin plastered on his face. James and Lily, along with little Harry came next. Both parents wore confused frowns on their foreheads, and before Harry could notice them too and squeal his little lungs away, turned around and left after Remus promised to tell them what happened later.

Making progress

Severus woke up feeling better than he had ever felt before. The usual morning stiffness that locked his neck in pain was no more, he didn't have the recurring nightmare that plagued him since the attack on Hogsmeade three weeks ago, and his mattress was... not a mattress at all. Severus nearly jumped like a scared cat when he lifted his gaze and was greeted with the sight of a sleeping Remus Lupin, who unconsciously tightened his hold on him and nuzzled his nose into the dark locks. Severus went still, but after some minutes, started to move again, trying to free himself from Lupin. He moved one of his legs back, but stopped abruptly when something poked at his thigh.

Holy-motherfucking-shit. Remus Lupin was as hard as a rock. Severus's eyes grew as wide as plates while his cheeks gained a furious pomegranate blush. Only when someone barked a laugh from besides Remus's sickbed did he notice that Sirius Black was standing there, looking with glee at the very compromising position Severus found himself in.
Remus was thrown out of his wonderful dream - which consisted in him making sweet love to a very sexily shy Severus - thanks to someone's loud laugh and the tickling in his neck. Sweet Merlin! He'd forgotten that Severus was sleeping on top of him! Oh... and it looked like his... problem... was not only a dream... He nearly moaned when Severus tried to break free from him again and ended up brushing his thigh against his erection. Severus stilled again.

"Sirius, can you please give us a moment, please?" kindly asked Remus. Ririus gave a last mischievous grin to his best friend and winked, then said his goodbyes and left the werewolf and the Potions Master to their own devices, while he whistled some stupid song all the way to the infirmary door.

"Severus I'm sorry."

"Lupin I'm sorry..." Said both men at the same time. Severus's blush intensified and casted his eyes down, ashamed. Remus couldn't avoid compare this Severus to the one in his dream... Oh good Lord! how he wished Severus was his already...

"I... I should go before Madam Pomfrey comes..." ' or before Black returns' Severus thought. He started to move again, being careful not to brush any part of his anatomy against Lupin. Remus, regretfully, let him go.

"Can I go visit you after I'm released, Severus?" Called Remus before the dark man could move any further. Severus turned and looked at him with barely concealed surprise in his eyes.

"Uh... I..." Severus's brain urged him to tell Lupin to sod off and never bother him again, but the warmth he felt last night while being held by Lupin made him reconsider. The werewolf was just asking to visit him. If he dared anything malicious he could easily throw him on his arse out on the street and forbid him to come back. Lupin's hopeful expression made his stomack tie in a knot... "I guess you can. But I warn you, Lupin. If you or your friends try to hurt me once again, I'll make

sure that the hex you received looks like a nice present from Father Christmas." Said Severus. Lupin beamed at him and promised to bring a present when he came to visit.

Before crossing the threshold, however, Severus turned and caught Remus's attention once again.

"Lupin... Why does Potter's child know my name? Why does he know me?" Severus's quiet, dubitative voice carried to the werewolf's sensitive ears.

"Because Lily has shown him pictures of you. She tells him bedtime stories of when you two were best friends." Remus gave an amused little laugh. "James and Sirius are jealous of you. Harry says you are his hero and he wants to be all smart and crafty just like you." Severus's startled gasp was lost to the sound of a happy child's giggle.

Severus turned around when he felt little hands tug at his slacks. Little Harry James Potter was staring at him with wide eyes and a big smile adorned his cherubic face. Severus realized, for the first time, that Harry was just a little boy... Not James Potter, Not Lily Evans, Not Sirius Black, and Not Remus Lupin. This innocent little child was looking up at him with the brightest, happiest expression that anyone had ever directed at him and it made him feel like something bigh had clogged his throat.

The little boy extended his arms towards Severus, clearly expecting him to carry him, and Severus did just that. Harry started to babble about everything and nothing and Severus couldn't think of anything else while carrying the boy back to Remus's bed.

"And my mommy don' know I'm hewe! I came to see you and Moony. Dad said we can visit you soon in your shop. You gonna teach me to make potions, Sevewus? Cus I wan' to make potions. I even have my black thingy to cover my clothes! Mommy never let me help make potions without it."

Severus was looking at Harry amazed. Someone so little and so captivated by the subtle and fine art of Potions...

"We'll see. If your mother allowes you to come to my shop one day, I might test your potions ability and see if I can take on an apprentice. Certainly you'd be the youngest apprentice ever." Remus was looking quite mesmerized at Severus's change in attitude towards the child. He knew that Severus wouldn't hold his grudge against a baby, but he was conscious that none of the Marauders plus Lily were off the hook. They had a lot to make up for with Severus.

Harry's happy squeal stopped the Potters short in the infirmary doors. Lily and James looked like they had run a marathon from wherever they had been to the hospital wing. Once Lily saw her child in Snape's arms, did she relax.

"Harry James Potter! what are you doing here young man? Do you know how scared I was when I didn't find you in your bedroom?" Nearly screamed the redheaded woman.

"Mommy! Mommy! Sevewus said I'm goin' to be his 'pwentice! Sevewus will teach me to make potions!" Happily said the child, while climbing off Severus's lap and running towards his parents. James catched him in the air as the child jumped into his father's waiting arms.

"Seriously, champ? Is Severus really going to teach you? That's nice of him..." said a not so very amused James Potter, while carying his son back to Remus's bedside. Lily only rolled her eyes when her child ignored her. Of course nothing else existed when you presented Harry with the prospect of sharing some time with Severus. She shook her head with fond exasperation when Harry wiggled out of James's arms and jumped into Severus's lap once again.

"You see mommy? I be the youngest 'pwentice! No, Sevewus?" Asked the little boy.

"Well, you won't be Severus's apprentice if you run off without telling me first, young man." Said Lily. She almost wanted to laugh at the startled gasp that left her son's little mouth.

"No! Mommy, I pwomise I be good!! Pwease let me be Sevewus's pwentice!! Pwease!" The child clung to Severus's robe like a lifeline. Remus chuckled and broke the awkward silence that followed the boy's pettition.

"Yes, Lily. Let him be Severus's apprentice. Maybe he can teach this young man some modals. Like not jumping on an injured man's ribcage. I can even walk him to the apothecary and bring him back when his lessons are over." Said Lupin, giving the woman a meaningful look, which Snape completely missed, still mesmerized with the babbling child in his arms.

Lily quickly caught Remus's line of thought and suddenly agreed, while James only looked with a confused expression on his face.

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The first thing Remus Lupin did after being released from the infirmary was go to see Severus. He was on his way down the path that led to Hogsmeade's principal street when, from his position, he could see two figures comming out of the three broomsticks, The taller figure wrapping an offensive (from Remus's perspective) arm around the shorter figure's waist. It was clear who the shorter figure was. Remus walked as fast as he could, jealousy fueling his anger and his desire to rip that sranger's arm. He watched as both stopped in front of Severus's apothecary and Remus immediately stopped behind a house when he could hear what Severus and the stranger were saying. He was still two blocks away from them, but his sensitive hearing helped him a lot.

"Don't you want to come inside? Have some coffe, maybe?" asked Severus in a cheerful, yet shy tone of voice. Remus nearly growled with frustration. He could see the expression on the stranger's face: that man eyed warily the shop, but Severus had cast his beautiful black eyes down, so he couldn't see the hesitation on the other's face.

"No. I have already taken much of your time, Severus." Said the man in a condescending tone, lifting his hand to cup Severus's cheek. Severus blushed. Remus gripped the edge of the house with such force that his knuckles turned white. "I'm sure that you have lots of pothions to brew. Maybe next time." The stranger caressed Severus's cheeks. "Or... maybe next time, we can run away for a whole day or two... just the two of us... We could go to my house..." The stranger bent his neck to wisper in Severus's ear. "And maybe you will finally let me make you mine..."

Ok. That man was already dead. And Remus would have liked to tell him then and there. Severus's whole face turned the cutest pomegranate shade of scarlet and his eyes widened like saucers. Remus wanted oh so very much to rip that man to shreds! To kill him and revive him and kill him again just for daring to look in Severus's direction let alone for daring to touch and say such filthy things to HIS mate!! Who the hell did that man think he was?

Severus couldn't say a word. He only stared at the stranger with the biggest doe eyes Remus had ever seen and it infuriated him! It should be HIM the one Severus looked at like that! But then, something in the stranger's demeanor caught his attention.

Severus had grabbed his left arm. The one that was near his face, and in doing so, he revealed part of the man's forearm and Remus could clearly see part of a moving tattoo: the head of a snake... The stranger immediately removed his hand away and hastily covered his tattoo with his sleeve. Severus was so stunned that he didn't see the man's dark mark glaring at his face! But Remus had

seen it! He would make sure that Severus knew who that man really was.

The Death Eater leaned closer and kissed Severus chastely on his cheek, then turned around and dissaparated.

Chapter 7

Severus entered his shop feeling dizzy. He had no idea that Nick felt that way towards him... It was kind of weird... Sure, he felt flattered, I mean, in his whole life the only kind of feelings he had inspired in other men were hate, pity and... hate... you can ask his father and the marauders if you don't believe him. But at the same time Severus felt wary. Nick was a very handsome man, almost as handsome as Lucius Malfoy, and precisely the blond man taught him that no one would want him just because. Everyone always had an ulterior motive when they sought out Severus's favor. Of course, he was no fool, and after his well learnt lesson, he never commited the same mistake twice.

He wasn't denying the attraction he felt for Nick, but something told him that he should take things slowly... maybe get to know him more, or something. Severus's intuition was accurate, and it was telling him that letting a man he had known for barely six months come closer was a mistake. Every time he spent a moment in Nick Eckhart's company made him feel wanted and desired, but at the same time it filled him with aprehension and a certain kind of fear... That man could make his skin crawl in an unpleasant way sometimes. It had happened back when he first met him, one time that he was looking peacefully at the tombs in the old church's cemetery. Severus was reading the epitaphs when he felt a heavy gaze focused on him, the feeling was awful, as if something dark and nasty was lurking in the shadows, waiting for him to get distracted to attack him. Then, Severus turned his gaze, a smile on his face, and the awful feeling vanished, but Eckhart remained there with him, looking at him as if he was the most interesting thing in the world to see.

Severus was brought out of his reverie when the bell to the front door of his apothecary rang. In came none other than Remus Lupin. He wasn't expecting to deal with the man so soon, but he had promised that he would give him at least a chance to try to befriend him...

Lupin came to stand mere inches in front of Severus, leaning in just a little bit to deposit a tiny kiss on the sallow cheek. Severus was tunned by Lupin's action, so he naturally looked at the man as if he had grown another eye...

"Sorry, I just... Ah... Nevermind." Said Lupin. At least he had the decency to look ashamed. "Here, Harry sent you this letter," Lupin extended a badly folded parchment towards him and he took it. "Harry sends his regards and asked me to tell you to not mind the tear stains on it. He really wanted

to come, but since he didn't want to take a shower, Lily forbade him to come the whole week. Harry is taking his punishment as a grown man I must say." Said the wolf. There was amusement in his tone, but Severus didn't care. He was watching the contents of the parchment.

It was a drawing. There was the very orange sun and a few green clouds in a pink sky. A small apple tree and a tallet than the tree Severus was holding a very tiny Harry by the hand, both smiling and waving hello to the real Severus. Everything was drawn in crayons and, as Lupin said, there were a few tear stains on the parchment. Fortunately, none touched the very... artistic... piece.

"Thanks... Well, to what do I owe the honor of your visit, Lupin?" Said Severus, going behind the counter and storing the parchment into one of his books.

"Well, I promised Harry that I would bring him some chocolate from Honeydukes and thought of comming to see you. I really wanted to thank you for the chance you'ved given me, Severus. I promise that I will not throw it away. I really want to be your friend..."

"Yes... yes... you've said it before, Lupin. I honestly don't know why I agreed tothis, but I sincerely doubt that we will ever become friends. Maybe you will grow tired of me, or you will be convinced by Black and Potter to play one of your humilliating pranks on me and we will go back to being strangers. I..." Severus's voice was dejected, and a bit melancholic.

"No!" Nearly shouted the werewolf. "I won't let them hurt you anymore, I swear." Severus raised an eyebrow.

"Ok..." he said, a bit out of sorts. "Anyway. I suppose that you're good enough if Madame Pomfrey let you come all the way down here."

"Yes. She was not very pleased to see me out of bed tree days ago, but there's only so much I can take being confined to a bed with nothing to do but listen to James complain about Harry's impending apprenticeship with you..." Severus looked up to see Lupin's face at that last statement and found a very amused smirk on the werewolf's lips.

"He must be clawing his eyeballs out, I imagine..." retorted Severus with a satisfied smirk of his own. Lupin's heart melted a little.

"Yes..." Both men stood awkwardly in front of one another, looking each other in the eye. Severus felt uncomfortable and broke the silent spell by clearing his throat.

"Well, I guess you must get back to Harry. He should be expecting the delivery of his chocolate very soon, I suppose." Severus turned his back on Remus to go behind the counter. Remus's expression faltered a little, but he couldn't blame the dark haired man. Severus probably felt uncomfortable still.

"Yeah, he made it quite clear that I was to deliver his candies before dinner. Lily absolutely hates when he's on a sugar rush." Severus's smirk was back in place at the mental image Lupin provided him with. He bent down to retrieve something from the counter and gave it to Lupin.

"I know that the kid already said he had one, but if he's going to be my apprentice, he has to look like it." Remus unfolded the cloth. It was a black dragonhide apron that woild be able to cover little Harry from neck to fingers to ankles. Attached, there were a pair of muggle goggles and a note, that Remus carefully tucked away in his breast pocket.

"Wow... Harry's going to be hyped for months..." Said Lupin. "I'm sure that he will love this 'thingie' to bits, Severus. Thank you." Lupin's smile lighted up his face... how had he never realized

that Lupin had a nice smile?... Anyway. Severus cleared his throat.

"Yes, well... Make sure to tell him that if he keeps being contrary to his mother and missing valuable time from his training, I will reconsider my offer and find another young apprentice. Tell Mrs. Potter that the boy must be dressed in his apron. Safety measures..." Said Severus. Lupin gave him one last smile and a murmured 'see you soon', then left.
Severus shook his head. When had he let go of all his grudges and hate for the man that had just vacated his shop, and his friends? He breathed in deeply. Maybe what the old Master Pettyfer told him before passing away was true: time could heal even the deepest wounds, only if one is willing to forgive.

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By Monday morning, little Harry was a ball of nerves rolling around his parents' quarters at Hogwarts. It was not even 6 A.M. and the child was already dressed, had combed his hair in the neatest way possible, and had even brushed his teeth. Twice.

Lily and James Potter were blissfuly asleep, when all of a sudden a destructive bomb fell upon them, flailing limbs kicking here and punching there.

"Harry, love, it's 6 A.M. please go back to sleep." Said Lily, trying to catch Harry, who was making a very accurate representation of the movements of a worm.

"But Mummy, we gonna be late! Sevewus said that I must be on time!" Said the little child.

"Yes, love. I know. But Severus opens his shop at 10. There's still time. Come here." Lily wrapped her child in her arms and, once she made sure to program her clock at 7, went back to sleep.

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After Lily made Harry take a quick shower and dress propperly to go to Severus's, Remus and Harry left the castle in a hurry; both thinking of their own reasons to want to see their sour man.

"Moony, you think that I can buy a pwesent fo Sevewus? Mummy gived me 2 galleons." Said the boy, pulling the two coins from his pocket and showing them to Remus, while Remus looked at him with curious eyes.

"Well, I don't know. We still have half an hour before Severus opens his shop. Maybe we can go to Honeydukes and buy some minty chocolate."

"Yay! I buy him lots and lots of chocolate!" squealed the boy. Once inside the candy shop, Remus lifted Harry into his arms and made his way towards the chocolate section, picking some bars of dark chocolate for him and some of chocolate mint for Harry.

Fifteen minutes later, they were standing outside Severus's apothecary. Harry's little fist was about to knock on the door when it suddenly opened and a very disheveled Severus came out in a rush, almost tripping Harry and Remus over.

Luckily, the werewolf managed to avoid and catch him at the same time, pulling Severus towards his chest and hugging him by the waist.

"Are you all right, Severus?" Asked Lupin, a bit worried for the expression on Severus's face.

Severus could only shake his head, eyes glued to his fireplace. It was until violent green flames erupted from the fireplace that Remus noticed what was wrong. Someone was trying to enter by

force to Severus's apothecary.

Remus pushed Harry into Severus's trembling arms and drew his wand out of its holster, entering the shop. "Severus, please stay inside your wards." commanded the man, while casting a revealing charm on the fireplace.

Remus's threatening growl scared Severus and Harry, who hid his face in Severus's neck. "Sevewus, what happens?" asked the boy.

"I don't know, Harry." Said Severus, trying to soothe the child.

Lupin waved his wand a few times more and finally sent a cutting hex through the floo. They could hear a pained scream comming from the fireplace when the flames suddenly extinguished. Remus casted a few more wards in the fireplace and extended them to cover completely Severus's apothecary and house.

"What was that?" asked the potions master, while rubbing Harry's back to confort him.

"Someone with the dark mark was trying to enter. I don't know who it was, but they knew about your wards. They were trying to take them down" Said Lupin still looking angrily towards the fireplace. Severus didn't know who could have been. No one knew about his wards except the man standing before him and his friends, Dumbledore, McGonagall... and then the day of the attack at Hogsmeade came to his mind. "Malfoy..." murmured the dark haired man.

"How does Malfoy know about your wards?" asked Lupin in a commanding voice. He really hadn't wanted to use that tone of voice with Severus, but he was still in 'protect my mate' mode.

"That day... When Hogsmeade was under attack... Lucius Malfoy tried to enter my shop. I made it so that the wards identify the dark magic whithin the dark mark, and it burns the person from the inside. They can't come in. If they try, the pain becomes so unbearable that they are rendered unconscious from the pain within the first yard." explained Severus. "He said that he was returning the favor for saving his son... He said that the Dark Lord wanted me for his cause, and that if he didn't have me, no one would. Someone told him that I frequent Dumbledore... He said that I had been friendly with the Dark Lord's enemies... " Severys was shivering by the end of his speech. Harry noticed and hugged him harder, planting an innocent kiss on his forehead and cheek. Severus smiled unconsciously.

"We need to increase the security measures in your shop, Severus. And you also need to be guarded... Maybe a tracking charm.., something that can alert me as to where you are and if you are injured or not..." Remus had started to talk to himself. Severus really didn't know what to think.

"Lupin..." said Severus, though Remus gave no indication that he had heard him. "Lupin!" this time, Severus's shout brought him back from his musings. "I know you are worried for the child, but my wards are safe now. Also, you said that you would bring him and collect him when he ad to go back home. He will be safe. I promise." said Severus in a subdued voice.

"It's not Harry the one I'm worried for, Severus. They don't want him. They want you. and I won't allow them to take you away now that..." Lupin was close. Much to close for Severus's confort. The werewolf was caressing his waist in a... loving... manner, and Severus felt a bit uncomfortable; as if lots of bugs were wiggling in his insides.

"Now that what, Lupin?" asked Severus in a whisper. He had no idea why, but suddenly the werewolf's amber eyes looked so beautiful in the lamp light...

"I... I care about you, Severus. You have no idea how much... and if something happened to you I..." Lupin broke the contact and turned away from him, making a supreme effort to not take the man then and there... His instincts were making him go mad!

"Why?" Was Severus's quiet response. Both men had forgotten about Harry's presence, and the little child was looking at them as if he was looking at a ping pong game, but one thing was clear for the boy: Remus was looking at Severus as his daddy looked at his mommy whenever she was not looking...

"Because..." And then, in a milisecond, Remus was back in front of Severus, his arm traveling fast to wrap itself on Severus's waist, his other hand tangling in the soft dark hair and just like that the werewolf was kissing his mate. Severus's surprised eyes closed in pleasure and the hand pushing Remus away was now clitching his shirt like a lifeline. Harry was crushed in between them, but the little boy didn't mind. Uncle Moony was making one of Harry's dreams come true: he was turning Severus into part of his family.

Chapter 8

A month went by. Harry and Remus kept visiting Severus on a regular basis; while the little boy would spend his two hours doodling ingredients while Severus described their appearance, and trying to write a brief description of each one -which resulted idle since Harry couldn't write nor read-, Remus would stare at them both, pretending that he was working on his lesson plans for next term. The truth was that Remus spent the time imagining that the picture he had in front of his eyes: Harry drawing happily on the floor and Severus stirring his potions while trying to teach something to Harry; was the one of his very own family.

He hadn't told Severus about the true nature of his intentions, though he and the dark man had formed some kind of relationship. Neither knew where they stood with the other, but Remus considered a great advance that he could come to visit Severus - with or without Harry-, and the man would be welcoming towards him; even accepting quick goodbye kisses on the lips that Remus gave him when he had to go back to Hogwarts.

They talked about the incident the day after it happened. Remus was uneasy about leaving Severus on his own in his shop, but he didn't really have any other choice. They discussed about possible Death Eaters that could have gained the address of his floo connection, but Remus had only one suspect in mind.

Sirius and James visited often, to make sure that the wards they placed on Severus's shop and home were stable, and made rounds around Hogsmeade in case something was out of place.

Severus hadn't seen Nick for about a month. He had no idea where the other man had gone off to, but Severus wasn't really worried. It was natural of the man to disappear one day and come back the next without giving explanations. To be honest, Remus and Harry were keeping his mind occupied and he only thought about the man when he saw him walking down the street through his window. The man was accompanied by another hooded figure, and Severus stopped short on his tracks to the door when suddenly the hooded man looked straight at him. It was one of the Dark Lord's most notorious Death Eaters: Evan Rosier.

Suddenly, both men stood in front of his window; right in front of him, and Severus could see that Rosier had his wand trained on Nick's back. Severus didn't know what to do. He wanted to help his friend, but also knew that going out where the protection of his wards couldn't reach him was dangerous... He could see how Rosier raised his wand and put it in front of Nick's neck, trailing it up and down, and could see the man murmuring something... It could only be a spell, since the skin on Nick's neck where Rosier's wand touched turned red by the second.

Severus reached for his wand, and when he did he could feel something inside his pocket; then, he remembered that Remus insisted him to carry that stupid little ball everywhere he went; it was a device that he and Lily had invented and often used to comunicate between them when Remus

brought Harry to the shop.

The glass in front of Severus's eyes fogged, and letters started to write themselves forming a message: 'Come out and surrender, Snape. Or your friend will pay dearly for your treason. The Dark Lord will be so pleased to meet you, I'm sure.'

Nick's panic and pain were evident. Severus couldn't leave him alone. If they were torturing Nick, it was because of Severus. The potions master reached into his pocket and clenched the little ball in his fist, closed his eyes and exhaled slowly. 'I'm so sorry. Please tell Lily and your friends that I forgive them. I can't let an innocent die because of me, I hope you understand. I'm sorry, Lupin.'

The ball fell from his hand, and Severus, wand hidden in his holster, came out of his shop. Then, everything went dark.

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Remus Lupin was a calm and composed man, and Lily knew her friend was proud of those traits, so, when she saw his eyes grow wide and the man shot up from his seat as if someone had ignited a firework in his ass and ran for the door, knew that something was very, very wrong.

So, Lily picked up the little ball that had fallen from her friend's hands, read the message, picked Harry up from the floor, sent a patronus to her husband, Sirius and Dumbledore, and ran all the way to the medical wing; surely Poppy could take care of Harry until they came back with Severus safe and sound...

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When James and Sirius listened to Lily's message, both men knew what they had to do. They were near the entrance to Hogwarts, so they immediately crossed the threshold and the wards and apparated in front of Severus's shop. A few seconds later, three more pops of apparition could be heard by both men.

Sirius turned around, wand in hand, and saw a very angry Remus Lupin making his way towards them. "Moony stop! We need to check the wards first to see what happened. If you enter the shop, you'll only tamper whatever residues of magic could be left."

Remus was downright panting with rage. "There was no battle here, Sirius. You know I can smell it even from afar. Severus came out of his shop willingly, and I know who made him come out... There are two very distinctive smells, and I can identify one." The headmaster looked at the werewolf, and the amber-eyed man let him read his mind. A soft gasp was audible after Dumbledore released Remus.

"I'll call for the order. James, Sirius, The man we are searching for is named Nick Eckhart. He is a confirmed Death Eater; Ted Tonks saw him in one of the raids in Leicester... Please, if you encounter him, be careful. He's very dangerous." Said the old man. Then, with a pop, apparated away to call reinforcements.

"I knew I should have told Severus about that man! It's my fault that he took Severus..." Said Lupin. Then, when he lifted his gaze, could see some words written on the window. "James, look at this!" Everyone could still read the message, but no one knew to what friend it could possibly refer to.

"You mentioned that Severus met this Nick somewhere sometime ago, right? And that they seemed to be close?" Asked Lily. "Maybe... maybe it was a trap... If this guy Nick knew that

Severus cared for him, he could have easily used that care against Severus! They probably made him think that this idiot was in danger to make him come out... but why would he apologize?"

"Because he still feels guilty about my injury from when the Death Eaters attacked Hogsmeade." Said a dejected Lupin. It was very difficult for him to stay calm when he knew his mate had been captured by Death Eaters.

"What do you mean?" Asked James.

"He told me that Lucius Malfoy threatened him that night... That the Dark Lord wants Severus to serve him, and it looks like he won't stop until he has him..."

Dumbledore and some other members of the order came back after a few minutes. Sirius and James had gathered some ideas and, with Remus's help, were able to recostruct the scene. Alastor Moody had offered some information about Severus's possible whereabouts, and everyone split into teams.

Remus, James, Lily and Sirius were sent to one of Voldemort's known liars. It was a townhouse, in the outskirts of London. Sirius Immediately recognized the place.

"Wait!, We must be careful. This place was a gift to Regulus from my parents... They gave it to him right after they diswoned me." Said Black. He started casting blood-recognizing spells, to check of the wards would accept him as a Black, which they immediately did. "I only hope my brother isn't home..."

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Severus woke up feeling nauseous. His head was spinning and he couldn't seem to control any part of his body. He felt soft fabric brush one of his hands; raising his head, he could see a familiar face through narrowed eyes.

"Nick... You... you're alright? Did they hurt you?" whispered Severus. Nick was crouching in front of him, and, although he seemed to be unharmed, there was still the red mark on his neck. Severus raised a hand and tried to touch him, but fell face first on the floor when Nick suddenly stood up and moved backwards.

"Ah-ah! Severus. What would my boyfriend say if he saw you trying to touch me..." whispered Eckhart.

"Nick... What are you saying..." Nick let out a creepy little laugh... The hairs on the back of Severus's neck stood on end. "Nick... Where are we?" Severus tried to stand up by supporting himself on the wall next to him, but someone's foot on his back immobilized him. "Nick, what's happening? What are you doing?" Severus's voice came laced with fear and a bit of desperation; Echart's face twisted in an awful smirk of satisfaction.

"You really thought that I would stoop so low as to befriend a lowly mudblood like you, let alone fall in love with you?" Eckhart scoffed. "Don't make me laugh! I only did what the Dark Lord asked of me, nothing else." The man started to pace a short distance. Severus lifted his head once again and could notice that they were inside a cell. It was dark and damp, and the only light came from some torches on the hallway. Eckhart started to mutter to himself. "If Malfoy had done his job, I wouldn't have been tainting myself touching the disgusting likes of you. I swear that that man will pay... Oh! How glorious will it be to see the Dark Lord tear you limb from limb for disobeying... I don't know why he wants you so much... But I bet your punishment for turning your disgusting back on him will make an example to all the others... blood traitors and scum... for

daring to reject our cause..."

After some time, Severus tuned him out. He couldn't believe what his 'friend' was saying. How could he have been so stupid! Of course a man as handsome as Nick wouldn't have put his sights on Severus of all people... Nobody ever wanted poor, ugly Snivellus. Not even the Dark Lord. He only wanted him because of what he could offer; Lucius warned him about betraying his master, but Severus never really agreed or accepted anything Voldemort-related. He hadn't even met the man, for fuck's sake!

A sharp sound startled both men, then, a door closing and strong, yet soft footfalls were heard.

"Get out of here, Eckhart. Your boyfriend's waiting for you upstairs." Said the rich deep voice of Lucius Malfoy. Talk of the devil, Severus thought.

"What are you doing here, Malfoy?" Spat the other man. "It should be the Dark Lord comming to see his gift, not you! Get out of here! I'm not moving away from this mudblood! He's mine to deliver to the Dark Lord himself!" Severus could clearly see the madness creeping into Eckhart's eyes... The man was almost as bad as Bellatrix Black back in the day, when she used to radiate obsessiveness off her body everytime she spoke of her beloved Lord.

"The Dark Lord knows of your deed, Eckhart, and he sent me to check if it is true. Now leave, before I report your disobedience to Bella..." Nick gulped audibly, and with one parting kick to Severus's ribs, the man left the cell.

Lucius waited until Eckhart was out of earshot before hurrying to Severus's side. He had never particularly liked the youger man, but he was still grateful for saving his son's life. He knew that, although he paid Severus for his professional help, his mastery of his art and his talent alone could have saved his beloved Draco from the brink of death...

"I told you to stay away from those blood traitors, Severus. The Dark Lord knows you are here and he won't let you go anytime soon. He wants to mark you, and from what I gathered from Bellatrix's rampage, he also intends to take you as his consort." Whispered Lucius to Severus's ear. Severus's eyes opened like plates.

"W-What are you saying..." Severus whispered back. "Why would your master want me if he doesn't even know me?"

Lucius was not known for his sympathy towards others, and although Severus had never been more than a peasant to him, the boy had never done anything to aggravate him. He wasn't even bothered when Severus suddenly gravitated away from the Death Eater wannabes during school and kept to himself. So, he surprised even himself when all of a sudden, the whys as to the Dark Lord's obsession with Severus came tumbling from his mouth.

"Do you remember one Yuletide when Slughorn made all of the Slytherin house take a picture? He even gave us each a copy..." He waited until Severus nodded his head. "That time, when I came back home, the photo slipped from one of my books. I didn't notice at the time, until one day my father brought the Dark Lord home." Lucius cleaned the floor with his wand and cushioned it, helping Severus to settle and sitting beside him. "Back then I wasn't a Death Eater yet... I remember that I was in my seventh year and was to receive the mark at the end of the summer, so I was surprised when my father summoned me to his study while the Dark Lord was still there." Severus was listening curiously. "The Dark Lord had the photo in his hands, and was looking at it as if it held a long lost secret. He asked if I knew all the boys and girls from the photo and started pointing at random faces, until he stopped on you... 'And this lonely boy over here? What's his name?' he asked me. I told his your name and what little I knew about you at the time. He learned

that you were bullied by most of the school, and that you were the half-blood descendant of the last Prince. He learned that you were best friends with a mudblood, and that she turned her back on you when you needed her the must, just because of a slip of the tongue. He asked me if he could keep the picture; what was I to do but accept?"

Severus was speechless. Lucius kept talking.

"The day before I had to go back to Hogwarts, He approached me. He asked me to keep an eye on you, but I wasn't to disturb you. He said that you would come to him by yourself. We started corresponding: he would always ask about your day, who you were spending time with, your grades, your passions... He was actually surprised when he learned that you were the best at Potions in the whole school; even better that the pathetic excuse of a teacher we had back then." There was a moment where the silence stretched a second too long, so Severus spoke.

"But why me? I was just a lonely, bullied, poor, ugly kid that no one would bother to look at twice... This makes no sense." Whispered the dark haired man.

"I didn't know. The day we came back home he was there, in the platform, polyjuiced as my father. no one noticed the difference except me. He made me wait until you and your mother left the station. We followed you at a reasonable distance, and the Dark Lord was looking at you as if he wanted to burn your image in his memory. At first I didn't know why he bothered so much with someone he considered below him. I thought it was your mother... maybe he wanted to secure the Prince's loyalty by getting into her good graces, but she had been disowned, so it would be futile. It was until a year ago that I realized what I had been too dense to see." Severus looked Malfoy in the eye, expecting and fearing at the same time what the blond ad to say. "He had fallen in love with you, Severus."

Severus gulped audibly. "How did you know?" he asked.

"He has a locket with your picture on it. He cut you from the original picture. Sometimes, when he thinks he is finally alone, he stares at you ans whispers to himself how he will make you come to him, how you'll beg for him to brand you as his..." A shiver ran down Severus's spine. "He doesn't want you as a potions master, Snape. He wants to own you, your body, your mind and your soul will be his. You know that Bellatrix is mad for him, so you can imagine what happened when the Dark Lord announced his intentions to bind you to him when Eckhart told him he had captured you..."

Severus was seriously trying not to panic. He concentrated on his breathing and after a few moments was able to think coherently... more or less.

"Did... Did Nick now about your master's intentions before today?" asked Severus.

"No. No one knew. He wanted you to come to him on your own, but took on a more active approach when someone reported to him that you were being friendly with your bullies... specially with the werewolf." Severus blushed.

"There's nothing going on between Remus and I!." He shot back.

"Well... not in the Dark Lord's eyes." said Malfoy. "Listen, Severus, I don't know what He plans to do now. Right now he's not here, but I'm sure he won't be long. I suggest you try not to aggravate him, or it could get bad for you." Lucius stood up andwent for the door.

"Wait!" said Severus when the blond man was about to cross the threshold. "Why did you tell me all this? Why are you giving me advise? We're not friends..."

"No, we're not. But I've seen what he is capable of doing, Snape, and no one deserves to live that kind of hell."

Severus folded in on himself, hugging his knees to his chest. All of a sudden, an awful coldness seeped into his very bones. When he closed his eyes, he could picture Remus Lupin's frantic face.

"Please, help me..." whispered the dark haired man, wishing that his plea could be answered.

Chapter 9

Remus was desperate. It had been almost a full day since Severus was kidnapped and neither them nor the Order had any information as to where the Death Eaters could have taken his mate to. Everyone had checked and double-checked the destinations they were asigned to, but there was no trail they could follow. Fortunately, everuone had made it back to the castle unharmed, because they didn't encounter any Death Eaters, which at the same time was worrysome; no one had been watching the buildings. Even Regulus's house was empty. No humans, no house elves...

"I don't understand. Why were there no Death Eaters?" asked Sirius. "I mean, not that I'm not glad to have made it out of those terror houses unscathed, but usually we have to fight at least 5 of the suckers to even cross the threshold..."

"You're right, Sirius. It doesn't make sense. I don't think that they were expecting us..." continued Dumbledore, while Moody's magical eye looked at everyone and no one at the same time. The old Auror was very quiet. "Alastor, what do you think?" asked the old headmaster. Suddenly, the magical eye of the auror stopped on Remus Lupin, who shivered and had a look of longing in his eyes.

"I think that we should ask Mr. Lupin what he is seeing right now." said the man. Remus's faraway look turned into one of concentration after the shiver passed, and some seconds later, a frantic expression crossed his face.

"Rem? What happened?" asked Lily.

"I guess... I guess that I know how to communicate with Severus..." said the werewolf.

Severus was huddled into one of the corners of his too small cell; the one Lucius Malfoy had enchanted with cushioning and warming spells. His eyes were closed, and despite the warmness that surounded him, the coldness and fear seeped into his very bones. He couldn't get Remus's worried face out of his head, and soon the werewolf's lips started to move. He thought that he was hallucinating, because seconds later he swore that he could hear the faintest sound of Lupin's voice in his head, so he closed his eyes and tried to concentrate on the sound.

Soon, Remus found it difficult to even imagine the werewolf's face any longer, because someone kicked the gate open and the noise startled him. A masked Death Eater came into view and seized him from both arms, forcing him to stand up, then, kicking him out of the cell and up the stairs. Severus soon found himdelf in front of the Dark Lord, whose blood red eyes looked at him with something that Severus couldn't decipher, but made his skin crawl nonetheless.

A few seconds later, de Death Eater that had brought him up was begging his master to stop the Cruciatus that had him seizuring on the floor, after daring to kick one of Severus's knees, making him fall to the floor in a kneeling position. Severus was scared. He didn't want to be there! The next time the Dark Lord raised his wand, Severus flinched and shut his eyes tight, waiting for a hex to come his way, but nothing happened.

When he opened his eyes again, the Dark Lord was before him, Death Eaters gone except for the two guards on the door.

"Stand up, Severus." Hissed the dark wizard, extending his hand for Severus to take. Snape looked at the appendage as if it was gonna bite him, risked a look at the Dark Lord's face, and very carefully rose to his feet, barely touching the man's skin.

"Finally I can meet you, Severus. I have been waiting for this moment for a very long time." The Dark Lord looked intently at him, while Severus kept his eyes down. "I have been told marvelous things about you. Tell me, dear Severus... Do you know who I am?"

"Y-yes..." stuttered the man. Suddenly, Severus felt a cold finger caressing his cheek. He was seriously trying not to panic now.

"Well, come with me. You and I have a lot to talk about..." Severus's eyes snapped up to meet the Dark Lord's. When their eyes locked, Severus could feel his body relaxing, and he could swear that the man's eyes became darker... much like dried blood, but there was something dangerous about them. The dark Lord wrapped one of his arms around Severus's waist and steered him to the back of the room, where another, more discreet, door was waiting. Severus could feel his body moving, but it was not out of his own free will. He wanted to turn around and run, but his legs felt like weed and his head as heavy as lead.

When they reached the door, the Dark Lord pushed him into the room and, after the door clicked closed, strong, snake-like arms wrapped around his waist, caging him between the Dark Lord and his bed.

Severus's panic increased.

"I've been waiting for you for a very long time, Severus..." The dark wizard almost purred into his ear. "I thought that you would come to me. That you would give yourself to me and allow me to treat you with the reverence you deserve... That you would allow me to deliver Potter's head and those of his friends to you in silver platters, but you disappointed me, love." Severus's legs felt weaker by the second. "Instead, you betrayed me with Dumbledore's pet werewolf..." Severus

gulped. "He can't love you the way I can, Severus... He can't give you what I can... You belong to me, and only me... Do you understand, love?" The Dark Lord threaded his fingers trhough Severus's silky hair and pulled his head towards his chest hard, and though Severus's face was impassive, his eyes betrayed the fear he was feeling in that moment. "But it doesn't matter anymore. I'm going to show you how much better I can love you tonight. And after tonight, your werewolf will never love you again. After tonight, the wizarding world will know that they have a King, and you will be my Queen."

The Dark Lord kissed Severus's hollow cheek and then, after biting hard on his neck, threw him face first on the bed.

"I'll make love so sweet to you that you'll never want another man in your life, my love." Said the man with a cruel smile on his face.

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Remus tried so hard to reach Severus to no avail. He thought that he had gotten his message through the first time he managed to reach him, but the time had been so short that he wasn't even sure that Severus got it. Then, whenever he tried to reach his connection to Sev, it was as if a blood red mist surrounded it. As if Severus had gotten lost in a fog bank.

Everyone was starting to get worried. The only information they could get was that Severus was being held in a cell. Remus tried again to concentrate and break through the fog in Severus's mind, but it was impossible; he couldn't see anything... then, as quick as lightning, he could feel fear and pain peaking. It was that kind of fear that paralyzed your soul, and Remus's eyes snapped open, irises glowing amber.

"He feels fear... I-I cannot see where he is, but I just got a glimpse of what he's feeling... Something must be very wrong... He's feeling scared, and he's in pain..."

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Severus had never been Imperioed before, but he had read about it in the restricted section of Hogwarts's library, when his friendship with Lily had just gone to shit and he was more convinced than ever to join the man that was doing unspeakable things to his body right now; so, he deduced that the spell he was under was another, crueler version of the Unforgivable, since he had no sensation of floating outside his body. In fact, he could very much feel the rough hands 'caressing' his tighs, and he could very much feel his fear rising like a tidal wave about to crash. Maybe it wasn't a version of the unforgivable, but another, equally cruel, spell. He had no comand over his limbs, but whenever the dark wizard above him ordered him to move his legs or hands he would do it. it was like being trapped inside his own body, and Severus hated every second, every touch the man gave.
After he was thrown on the bed, the Dark Lord positioned himself above him, his erect cock nestled between Severus's buttocks, and though his eyelids felt heavy, he could have opened them like plates at the obscene contact. This felt so very wrong on so many levels, that Severus thought he could die right then and there.

The moment he could feel his clothes being ripped apart and the cold air of the room hit his skin, Severus wanted nothing more than to run, but his body was still slack. He could move a little bit his fingers, but that was all. He could feel his hair being pulled roughly, and his head being lifted so that Voldemort could fit his head between Severus's neck and the mattress. The monster started licking his neck as if it was a lollipop. A sharp pain in his Adam's apple made him grunt in discomfort, and Voldemort released his head, letting it fall back to the sheets.

Severus tried to move his head to de side, and was surprised when he could do just that. The movement was slow and tiring, but he was sure that he had regained some control over his body. "I wouldn't want for my partner to be unresponsive to my attentions, after all..." whispered Voldemort in his ear.

He now could move his lims bit by bit. His arms and legs felt like lead, but he could at least try to push himself out of the monster's reach.

"Ah-ah, my Severus. I told you that I would make you mine..." whispered the man again. Suddenly, the body trapping him disappeared, only to be violently lifted off the bed, turned on his back and dropped back on the mattres. He could now see Voldemort face to face. When the man positioned himself back above Severus, the dark-haired man wanted to scream, but only grunts left his throat. He tried to push the Dark Lord away, but his arms were not strong enough. He wanted to kick him on the bollocks, but his legs barely responded him.

Voldemort started to kiss his face: first his forehead, his temples, his nose, his eyes, cheekbones, and finally his lips. The man forced him to open his mouth and thrust his tongue inside, taking his time to taste Severus, trying to coax his unresponsive tongue to follow his lead to no avail. Severus managed to put his weakened arms between his and Voldemort's chests, and tried to push him away again. Voldemort noticed and grabbed both of severus's wrists, locking them above his head with one arm while the other snaked along Severus's torso, pinching his nipples and scraching his skin, until the offending hand reached its destination.

Severus could feel himself being groped. Voldemort's fingers rolled his testicles with care and a bit of roughness. For any other man in his position it would have been a wonderful experience, but to Severus it felt wrong. He wanted to scream and be able to dissapear. He wanted someone to help him escape that kind of torture; the unwanted attentions of a madman were awakening his anxiety, and soon his panic flared when the man's mouth abandoned his and moved to his chest, kissing and biting and making Severus whimper in fear; the hand fondling his manhood moved further down, and wild fear took over.

He could not move much, and any movement he managed to do was outmanuvered by the man above him. Soon Severus found himself face down and his hands were tied to the headboard.

"My, my... Severus... What a surprise..." said the Dark Lord. "I certainly wasn't expecting this... gift... It looks like all those rumors that Eckhart told me were only that..." The man started to kiss and bite his back, and neck. Severus's shoulders were tense. "I knew that you would never betray me, Love. I knew you were saving yourself for me..." A sharp bite in one of his buttocks made Severus gasp.

"Please..." Severus managed to whisper. "Please... let... go..."

"Hmmm? How can you ask that of me, my love. Now that I have you, I'll never let you go." Replied the other man. "I love you, Severus. So very much." And with utmost care, the darkest wizard of the history took his time to stretch and prepare his 'love' for their first joining.

Severus couldn't feel the pain of the penetration, but every thrust of Voldemort's fingers brought silenced tears to his eyes. Then, when he felt the blunt head of the other man's cock breach him, he could only drown his cry for help into the mattress.

Voldemort started to move, and when he was sure that Severus wouldn't put up a fight, he released him from the cords. He hugged Severus from behind and kissed his neck tenderly, trying to coax him to stop crying; then, he started to caress him and whisper reassurances and words of love in his ears. Severus ignored him all the while.

Severus could feel the other man painting his insides with his seed; his anxiety peaked, his nerves were frayed, and when the Dark Lord turned him over to kiss him on the lips, he fainted.

Looking at the unconscious form of the man he had fallen for, a possessive gleam entered Lord Voldemort's blood red eyes. He crouched to Severus's face level and whispered into his ear: "Within a month you'll be completely mine, Severus. I'll prepare everything so that we can be bonded as husband and wife... I won't share you with anyone." The man sealed his promise with a kiss to the unresponsive lips.

Chapter 10

Tom Marvolo Riddle didn't think of himself as a bad man, nor a necesarily cruel one. He only did what was needed to achieve what he had always wanted. It was until he saw that picture of the Slytherin students so many years ago that he really knew what he wanted, and those things amounted to three. Be the leader of the magical comunity, submission and respect from the muggles, and the beautiful creature that was laying by his side right now. He had planned on achieving those goals in a predetermined order, but when one of his Death Eaters told him that his Severus was being pursued by the enemy, he knew he couldn't wait any longer. Severus had to be his right now, one way or another.

He had tried to warn the werewolf away, and had even made sure that Severus got the message; but the werewolf decided to ignore him. He approached Voldemort's Severus anyway; made Severus forget how awful he and his friends treated him, how HE almost killed him... and was taking him away. That was an offence he couldn't tolerate, so he had to act fast, before he could lose Severus.

Voldemort was conscious that what he just did to Severus would result in a rocky start for their relationship, but he was sure that once he showed the other man how much he loved him, and how happy he could make him, Severus would forgive him and get to love him the way he loved Severus. They understood each other, after all.

Since Severus left Hogwarts, Voldemort kept a close eye on Severus, and started to research ways to bind him to him. He never wanted to let go of his little snake. In one of his trips to Wizarding Egypt, he found a dark chest of parchments in the black market. He spent years translating the texts, and what was his surprise when he discovered that one of those parchments contained a very specific ritual, written by Queen Nefertari Marietmut herself, to ensure her husband's love towards her was greater and brighter than the one he felt for his other wives. After that, it took him only two years to modify the ritual enough in order to make it a binding one. The first step was already taken. Severus was his in body. He only needed to make him his in mind; he wouldn't give the younger man a choice. He would make a nuisance of himself if necessary in order to occupy Severus's thoughts only. Then, and only then, would he be able to complete the ritual by the end of the month. Severus's heart would belong to Voldemort alone.

The Dark Lord arranged the naked, unconscious form of Severus in his bed, refreshing the bedsheets and tucking him inside them. When he finished his bussiness, he went under the covers and spooned Severus from behind, wrapping him in the tight hold of his strong arms, then, Lord Voldemort fell asleep.

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When Severus woke up, it was to the rays of the sun gently hitting his face. He felt tired and sore, and when he tried to sit on the bed, his backside protested. Then, all that happened the night before came rushing to his mind and hit him like a truck. Suddenly, the arm tightening its hold on his

waist became very solid and Severus jumped out of bed, immediately recoiling to the farthest corner of the room. Lord Voldemort woke up soon after, and saw Severus huddled up there, trying to make himself as small as possible so that he couldn't be detected.

Riddle stood up from the bed and slowly approached Severus, who became even smaller if possible. It was clear that the Potions Master was terrified, he was still naked and the morning was cold, which probably contributed to Severus's shivering.

"I don't want to hurt you, Severus." Spoke the Dark Lord, extending a hand towards Severus, trying to coax him to go back to the bed. Severus eyed it warily.

"You already have..." replied the dark-haired man in a broken whisper. Riddle let his hand fall to his side and turned around to find some clothes to put on when Severus refused to look at him. The Potions Master had been smart enough to drag one of the bedsheets to cover himself.

Riddle sighed. He knew it would be difficult to win Severus, but what happened between them was something that he had to do. He came back to stand in front of Severus, caging him into the corner of the room. He had to be honest with himself; it was taking a lot out of him to not jump the young man in front of him again... those marks on Severus's neck were still looking fresh and they were doing things to his groin... but he vowed that he would wait until Severus gave himself to him...

Severus saw the man shake his head out of the corner of his eye. He didn't know what to do. He knew that he couldn't risk to anger the man in front of him, lest he received a repeat of yesterday's events... He had to think of something... Fast.

"Severus, please... Look at me." Said the Lord. Severus chanced a glance at the man's face, but made sure to not look him in the eye.

"What else do you want from me? you already took what you wanted!" Whispered the frightened man angrily.

"What I told you yesterday was not a lie. I love you, Severus. You are mine." replied the Dark Lord. "I know that, if you give me the chance, I can make you love me back... We were made for each other, love. Only we can understand each other..." Riddle extended a hand and cupped Severus's cheek, trying to coax him to look at him again, with no success.

"You don't even know me... How can you say that you love me? After what you did to me..." Severus shrunk back in on himself. The Dark Lord retracted his hand and stepped back. He knew that he couldn't force Severus right now, not more than he ad already done.

"I can't let you go, Severus. I need you here, with me. I know that you don't believe me when I tell you that I love you, but you'll see in time how big my love for you is." Severus wrapped the bedsheet a bit tighter around him. "We are made for each other, sweetheart, and I know that you will grow to love me as much as I love you. I won't allow anyone to hurt you again, my heart. Specially that filthy werewolf and his gang of idiots."

Severus tensed. Then, in a brave (or stupid) move, raised his eyes to meet those of the Dark Lord.

"How do you know about them?" he whispered.

"It doesn't matter how I know about them. I know you, Severus. I know what Potter and Black did to you. How they humilliated you, and how that werewolf never even tried to stop them! I know how that mudblood abandoned you when you needed her comprehension the most!" The dark Lord was nearly shouting, but he had to make Severus remember that those monsters were no better than

him... that they didn't deserve Severus's trust back again after what they did. Severus's eyes acquired a faraway look. "Lupin almost killed you! Just the very thought of it makes my blood boil in anger, my Severus. They hurt you in the most horrible ways! They must pay for what they did to you, and I won't allow them to hurt you again. So if, in order to prevent them from hurting you, I must keep you prisioner in this chamber, so be it."

Voldemort's robes materialized on him out of thin air, and with one last look at Severus, turned around and left the room, sealing the door after him. Severus ran after the man, but the door closed in his face. When he tried to open it, a shock of soft lightning hit his fingers. Not strong enough to hurt him, but it could keep him away from the door.

"Gods... how am I going to get out of here...?"

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It had been almost three weeks since Severus's kidnapping and they weren't getting closer. The Order of the Phoenix and some Aurors assigned to the case had been investigating and breaking in on Death Eater safehouses, but none had traces of Severus. They had even managed to catch three low-ranking Death Eaters, but they had no idea of what had happened to Severus Snape.

Remus was going mad. Every day that passed was a day closer to the full moon, and every day that Remus spent away from Severus, the wolf threatened to break free. He could only feel Severus sometimes, and those times he caught a glimpse of the raven haired man, he could see the desperation, the confusion, he could feel trepidation clinging to him like a heavy blanket. Today was one of those days, but it was different, because he could finally see though Severus's eyes, and he could see the Dark Lord approaching him, he could see the man touching his Severus with impunity, and Severus's feelings were confused. Remus could tell that Severus was scared and skittish, but he could also feel a tender feeling for the Dark Lord start to grow in his heart.

Remus saw red. Moony wanted to tear, destroy, rip apart the man that dared to touch and take his Severus away...

It was until two days before the full moon that the Order of the Phoenix got a solid lead to Severus's whereabouts. Lucius Malfoy was casually strolling with his wife and child around Diagon Alley when Sirius, coming out of Slugs and Jiggers with James, caught the blond's eye. The man led his wife towards Madame Malkin's, leaving woman and child there while he came back to the main street, signaling for Potter and Black to follow him.

James and Sirius were not sure of what to do, but in the end they remembered that Remus had told them something about the blond theatening Severus, so they decided to follow, always being aware of their surroundings. They got the blond man alone near the entrance to Knocturn Alley, where he was waiting for them inside one of the brothels. The people in there didn't even turn to look at them, so they went to the canteen and picked the table in the farthest, darkest corner to sit in.

"Why did you bring us here, Malfoy?" asked James, looking curiously at his surroundings.

"I know what you're looking for, and I can help you get it." Both Aurors turned to look at the blond man at the same time, then, they looked at each other. Finally, James spoke.

"Why should we trust you? You could very well be leading us to a trap for your master." Lucius only looked at them with contempt in his eyes.

"You are right, but I know something you don't. I'm sure that you've noticed how your friend is bordering madness..." both men looked at each other and reluctantly nodded. "It's because..."

Lucius looked around and pulled his wand out of his holster. He casted some privacy wards and notice-me-not spells in order to not be discovered. "It's because the Dark Lord is making a ritual. No one knows how it will be done, but it requires the Inner Circle and he'll do it when the full moon is in it's highest point. All I know is that the Dark Lord has been infatuated with Snape since he was a fifth year at Hogwarts and has been obsessed ever since. Snape is changing, but I'm sure it's not because he wants to. The Dark Lord can be very... convincing... whe he wants someone to change their minds..."

Sirius thought hard on the blond man's words. Suddenly, Remus's pale, angry face came to mind and he gasped. "He knows that Severus is Remus's mate..." whispered the Auror.

"I don't think he knows. The Dark Lord, despite having half the werewolves in Britain by his side, believes that they are animals, that they have no soul and their curse is a punishment. He doesn't believe in that 'werewolf soulmate' thing, or any other folklore for that matter. All he knows and all he cares about is that Severus must be his, and I'm completely sure that, if he has to wipe your werewolf friend and you off this earth to make it happen, he will."

"Why are you helping us? What's in it for you?" Asked James. Malfoy's words put him on edge. He didn't know to what extent Remus's bond with Severus had developed before Snape had been abducted, but he was sure that Remus wouldn't survive the Full Moon without Severus. That was pretty clear from the way his friend acted.

"You saw my wife and son, Potter. When Draco was born I was on a mission for the Dark Lord. I couldn't be there, and I almost don't make it thanks to Dumbledore. Through the years I've come to realize that there are more important things in life than hating muggles. I want out. Take me to Dumbledore, convince him to protect me and my family and I'll tell you where Snape is." Lucius Malfoy was not a nice man, but he wasn't stupid either. Severus was a good incentive for the men before him to bring him to Dumbledore, but he had something more for the man; something he wouldn't dare to reject if he wanted to win this war...

James and Sirius looked at each other. They also knew that Severus could be a minor casualty for Dumbledore, but they owed it to Remus to at least try to get Severus back. If what Malfoy was telling them was true, they only had a day and a half before the full moon rose in order to get Severus safe and sound back to Remus's arms...

"Bring your wife and son with you to the Three Broomsticks in half an hour. We'll be there to pick you up; but let me tell you, Malfoy... If this is any kind of trick, you'll regret it, understand?" The blond nodded.

"I'll be there."

The three men departed to their destinations, no one paying them anny attention. Half an hour later, as promised, Malfoy was waiting for Potter, Black and Dumbledore in the far corner of the merry tavern, his wife and son occupying one of the rooms upstairs. When he spotted the long, white beard of the Headmaster, he waved in his direction. Thankfully, the place was empty, Malfoy having paid the owner to keep it that way for the rest of the evening.

Behind Dumbledore, however, were not only Potter and Black, but the werewolf himself. Lupin didn't look an ounce of his merry self; he looked beyond angry, frail and about to snap. He wouldn't like to be in the Dark Lord's place when Lupin found out what was going to happen to Severus if they didn't hurry.

"Lucius Malfoy... I must say that I was not expecting your... cooperation. Nevertheless, it's welcome." Said the old headmaster. "James and Sirius have informed me of your situation and

what you are willing to offer in return..."

"And I'm willing to offer even more if you allow my family and me to live in the castle for as long as this war continues. My family home is no longer safe." Lucius knew that he was risking it all in one move, not so Slytherin on his part, but he was desperate. He had lied to Potter and Black. He knew exactly what was going to happen to Severus once the ritual was complete, and for the ritual to be complete, innocent blood had to be shed. The only innocent blood the Dark Lord had at hand was that of little Draco Malfoy.

"Where is Severus?" asked Lupin in a not so gentle manner. Malfoy looked at him and then at Dumbledore.

"If you want to know where Snape is, leave me and the Headmaster to speak alone." Dumbledore locked Malfoy's eyes in his for a minute and then asked the three Marauders to wait for him outside. Grumbling, the three left the tavern.

Fifteen minutes later, Dumbledore came out with the Malfoy family in tow. Dumbledore apparated all of them into his office in Hogwarts, and the little boy cried in excitement when he saw all the curious artifacts adorning the office.

"Dobby!" called the Malfoy patriarch. A small elf appeared minutes later in front of him and bowed down to greet his master.

"What can Dobby be doing for Master Lucius, Master?" asked the little elf.

"I need you to go to the manor and tell the rest of the elves to leave. They can go wherever they want, but they must ignore every and all cals that don't come from me. Then, I want you to pack clothes for my wife, my son and I. Make sure that no one sees you and come back as soon as possible. You will be assisting us here. Understood?"

"Yes, Master. Dobby be doing what Master tells!" The little elf popped away immediately.

"Well," said Dumbledore. "I guess it's time to act. Remus, please take Mrs. Malfoy to Lily. I'm sure she'll know where to accomodate the Malfoy Family." Remus eyed Narcissa warily, but did as he was told.

Once Remus, Narcissa and Draco were out of the Headmaster's office, the old man erected strong privacy wards.

"We have less than a day to get Severus back. James, Sirius, call the Order and as many Aurors as you can trust. This war is going to end soon..."

Chapter 11

Sirius and James did as they were told, and as soon as everybody was at Hogwarts, they departed. Lucius offered to take them to where Severus was being held captive, asking Madame Pomfrey for a satchel with different first aid potions and supplies, knowing that they would most likely need them. He was not a healer, but he'd seen his personal elf at work after coming from the raids...

Dumbledore had planned for Remus to stay at Hogwarts. That night was the first of the cycle, after all, and he didn't want to risk the man hurting anyone accidentally, but Remus had gotten to them before they departed and they had no more time to spare.

Once they arrived to Riddle Manor, Dumbledore made teams, appointing Sirius, James, Kingsley and Alastor as the leaders for each one, while he was just left in charge of Remus and Lucius. The blond man gave them the basic layout of the manor and advised them to look out for traps, and relied a list of the most dangerous Death Eaters that were likely to be there. The ritual was supposed to be done at the light of the moon, and the mansion had just the right spot for that.

It was almost 7:00 p.m. when they started to search for Severus, every team looking out for any tip or Death Eater. James and his team managed to trap three inexperienced ones, knocking them out cold and binding them so that they could portkey them into the DMLE offices, their Dark Marks visible.

By the time all the teams made it to the area where the ritual was to take place, most of the traps had been disabled and a lot of junior Death Eaters sent to the DMLE, some alive, some not.

Dumbledore was at the front of the squad, wand in hand, looking at Tom Riddle for the first time in many years. Remus and Lucius were at his sides.

Remus noticed that the inner circle of Voldemort's followers were all gathered in a circle around a stone table. Severus was tied and unconscious in the middle of it and the Dark Lord was hovering over him. Remus unconsciously let out a growl in anger, that alerted all the Death Eaters and the

Dark Lord himself. Voldemort's eyes landed first in Lucius, then he took his time looking at the faces of all his enemies. When his eyes landed on Remus, however, a nasty smirk shaped his lips; he lifted himself and landed softly in the ground.

"You are late, werewolf. Severus is already mine." said the man. His irises were completely blood red, with slits of white as his pupils. Lupin could only growl even angrier.

James and Sirius knew what was happening and immediately rushed to their friend's side.

"Remus, please... try to control yourself... you could hurt Snape!" whispered James in a worried tone. Lupin only growled louder. The moon was setting itself and Remus's eyes glowed amber in the dark of the night; his hands were balling into fists and the slightest sould of bones breaking could barely be heard above the sound of the wind.

"Let him go!" Demanded a still humanoid Lupin. Voldemort raised a perfect black eyebrow and laughed an awful laugh.

"He's mine, Lupin. I won't ever let him go, but if you want him, come and get him yourself... Otherwise, I suggest you to leave and leave us alone." Voldemort turned his back on Lupin and the rest of the Order of the Phoenix, trusting his loyal followers to protect him while he completed the ritual. "You couldn't defend him from your own friends, you won't be able to save him... You are a coward, Lupin. He's better off with me." The Dark Lord positioned himself again above Severus, then turned to look at Lucius. "You know the price for treason, Malfoy." Riddle narrowed his eyes. "Kill them!" ordered the Dark Lord to his loyal followers.

All the Death Eaters launched themselves into battle against The Order, but no one paid attention to the writhing werewolf on the floor. Spells were cast left and right, people being cursed, tripped and killed on the spot. Luckily for The Order, most of the deceased were Death Eaters.

James and Sirius were trying to reach Snape and Voldemort, only to be stopped by a big, dark wolf. It was full of scars and his back was a strong stripe of silver fur. They started to throw curses and hexes of the dark variety to the monster, trying to put him out of combat, when all of a sudden another werewolf attacked Greyback. It was Moony.

The werewolves were fighting each other, Remus trying to open a path to his friends so that they could get to Severus, and Grayback trying to block them while keeping Remus at bay. Various spells plew past both men, and hitting the bigger werewolf right in the chest, making him falter and giving Moony an advantage. "Come on, Potter, Black, we have no time!" Yelled Malfoy from beside them.

The three men started to run towards Severus when all of a sudden they heard something snap. Sirius, who was a bit behind James and Malfoy, turned abruptly, hoping with all his heart that it wasn't what he thought it was. He looked, and all he could see was a puddle of blood forming behind the big form of Greyback, whose neck was sliced open from fangs and seemed to be at a weird angle, as if it was broken. The beast started to move again and Sirius prepared his wand, only for the monster to be dropped on its back as Moony came from behind it, still growling and with its muzzle painted in blood.

The sound of spells hitting a shield alerted both werewolf and man, and both ran to where James and Malfoy were trying to stop Voldemort from completing the ritual.

The Dark Lord had Severus, still tied, hanging up in the air, just like him. The three men could see that Severus was now barely conscious and looking at the Dark Lord with confusion in his eyes. Soon, Dumbledore approached them while the rest of the Order took care of the defeated Death

Eaters.

"Leave the boy alone, Tom. He doesn't belong to you." Said the oldest man.

"I already told you that that won't happen. It's better if you take your pet wolf away while you still can, Dumbledore. I can take better care of my Severus." Not once did the Dark Lord turned to look at them.

"All your Death Eaters are captured, Tom. Surrender now, before this ends badly..." The Headmaster warned again. Riddle turned to look at the scene before him: All his loyal followers were wither dead or captured, in process of being transfered to Azkaban. He sneered.

"Do you really think I care what happens to them? All I need is my dear Severus. As long as he is with me I can start all over again..." There was some level of adoration radiating from the man's words and eyes when he turned back to look at a very confused Severus. Moony started to growl warningly again and prepared himself to attack when Voldemort produced a goblet made of glass. It was full of thick red blood.

Voldemort took a sip from the goblet and a thin rope the color of blood shot from where the man's hart was supposed to be, it started to surround him and Severus. The man made Severus open his mouth slightly so that he could force him to drink the blood. It dripped down Severus's chin, but he managed to swallow some, and another slim rope shot from Severus's chest this time, entwining with Voldemort's. Dumbledore started to cast spells at the shield, trying to break it; the other three men started to shoot spells as well. The ropes surrounding Voldemort and Severus were thickenning, forming a kind of cocoon around them.

Sirius was the first to notice the crack in the shield, so he started directing all his attacks there; soon the rest followed. It was slow but efficient. Kingsley and a few remaining Order members approached the group and, after noticing what was happening, started to attack the crack in the shield as well. Soon the shield couldn't support the attack anymore and it broke, surprising the Dark Lord, who momentarily stopped his chant in order to see what was going on.

Once he noticed that he had no time, he tried to pull Severus even closer, but before the cocoon could be completely formed, Moony strikked like lightning, closing his powerful jaw around Voldemort's neck and sinking his fangs in his throat.

Another snap made the people gasp in astonishment, but when the ropes started to disolve, they knew that the Dark Lord was finally and irrevocably dead.

Severus dropped unconscious to the stone table, and, once Moony made sure to separate Riddle's head from the body, he gently approached the unconscious form of his mate, licking his cheek and leaving bloody saliva there.

"Moony, mate, I think we need to thake Snape home." said James, trying to slowly approach the table. Moony growled at him, but suddenly a big, black dog appeared in front of James. Moony recognized his pack mate, and after a few barks from Padfoot, Moony let James approach Severus and take him in his arms. The dog barked again and Moony laid down, closed his eyes and let the human Sirius apparate him away.

Kingsley started to call on his Aurors, making sure that they took plenty of evidence while he collected the Dark Lord's body to take it with him to the Ministry. Alastor Moody aparated back to Riddle Manor with another squad of Aurors, who started to search the place again and taking any and every dark object they could find.

Lucius approached Dumbledore, and both men looked at each other. No one knew what to say. The old headmaster still couldn't believe that all it took to take Voldemort down was a lovesick werewolf... "There was a rumor amongst the Inner Circle," started the blond man, "He was so sure that no one would be able to defeat him because he had a trick up his sleeve... No one knew for sure what he was talking about, but lately he said that he and Severus would rule the world forever; that no one would ever dare to look down on them ever..." Dumbledore was paying avid attention. "Once, Bellatrix asked if he would ever concede his most loyal followers the gift of serving him forever, though I imagine she had no idea of how long 'forever' meant..." Dumbledore looked Lucius in the eyes, trying to decipher whatever it was that the young man was trying to tell him... Then, as if in a vision, a memory from long ago came to his mind's eye: Horace Slughorn confessing one of his darkest secrets... how he helped make Voldemort the monster that he was... "Horcruxes..." whispered Dumbledore. Lucius nodded and extended a leather bound journal towards him.

"He gave me this two years ago. Told me to protect it with my life, because it was more important than my own. I suspect this is one of those."

"Those? Are there more?" asked the Headmaster while taking the journal in hand.

"I think there are six, counting this one. The day he gave me this, he was visiting my dying father at Malfoy Manor. He ordered me to open my father's study for me, and called me inside a few minutes later. That's when he gave me the journal. Throughout the two weeks that took my father to finally die, he called another five Death Eaters to my father's study: Bellatrix, Rodolphus and Rabastan Lestrange, Regulus Black and Augustus Rookwood. I don't know what the other objects are, or where they are now, but I'm sure that those people know about them." Said Malfoy.

Dumbledore looked at the journal in his hand again, then, looked at Malfoy.

"Why are you telling me this now? Why not before comming for Severus?"

"Because I'm not stupid. If there's even the slightest chance of the Dark Lord comming back, he will obviously come for me and my family first. I cannot risk it. Besides, I'm not one to leave jobs incomplete... If the bastard is to be gone, he should be gone definitely. Besides, I don't want to go to Azkaban..." Answered the Malfoy patriarch.

It made sense, after all. Lucius would be persecuted by the Dark Lord's followers if this was left unattended, and he couldn't risk another war if Tom was to be revived.

"Very well... I'll keep you out of Azkaban, young Malfoy, but you will help us gain information on these Death Eaters' homes and possible hideouts. We must destroy these evil artifacts at once."

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James apparated with Severus directly into Hogwarts's hospital wing. The young Auror hadn't even had time to look at the state of the Potions Master, but once he'd deposited him in the nearest bed and shouted for Madame Pomfrey and his wife to come and help, he could see that Snape's body was painted in blood. Scars, fresh and old, some infected, others already scabbed over, littered the thin man's body. His wrists had burn marks from a rope, as if he had been struggling to set himself free. His lower lip was cut and swollen, and the side of his face had a nasty purple-greenish bruise in the shape of a hand.

Madame Pomfrey came rushing from her office; brandishing her wand left and right to summon potions and bandages, as well as some muggle medicine and a first aid kit. As soon as she started assessing Severus's injuries, she started to pour potions on the open wounds, and covering them

with the bandages. A few minutes later, Lily came in with a sleeping Harry in her arms, Narcissa Malfoy following her right behind with an equally asleep Draco pressed to her chest. Both women transfigured cots into cribs and placed sleeping and silencing charms over their kids and rushed to Pomfrey's side, helping them take care of Severus.

A moment later, a sorrowful howl could be heard in the distance.

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The morning came soon after Dumbledore appeared with Lucius Malfoy in Hogwart's hospital wing. Severus was still unconscious, and everyone, along with some other Order members, gathered around the old wizard to hear what had happened the night before, right after Sirius helped Remus back into the castle and settled him next to Severus.

"It looks like this isn't over. Lucius believes that Tom Riddle made six Horcruxes." The old man took the diary from his robes and showed it to all the others. "This is one of those. Lucius has no idea what the other five are, but he knows who must have them." Dumbledore turned to look at Sirius with a sombre expression. "Regulus Black was entrusted with one."

Sirius didn't know what to think. He had heard rumors about his little brother joining that monster, but he really never imagined that Regulus could be one of them...

"The others are Bellatrix, Rabastan and Rodolphus Lestrange, and Augustus Rookwood." Said Malfoy.

"Rookwood was killed in battle, along with Rodolphus Lestrange. Bellatrix and Rabastan are in custody right now. Alice and Frank Longbottom are in charge of the interrogations, Though we never saw Regulus Black during the battle. I don't think that he's part of the inner circle, otherwise he would have been there," Said Alastor Moody. The words of the seasoned Auror gave a little peace to Sirius's soul. "I'll have Kingsley file for a search order as soon as I arrive to the Ministry."

"Regulus inherited my parents' house after they died. I'll see what I can find there." Offered Sirius. James put a hand on his friend's shoulder, offering his silent support.

"We'll se about the rest after the orders are given." said Dumbledore. "We don't know what the objects that contain Riddle's soul are, but they are very Dark objects that lure your souls to surrender to your deepest desires... They might be protected, so be careful while looking for those." Everyone nodded. As soon as everyone wished Remus a nice recovery, they left, leaving only the Malfoys, Potters, Sirius, Remus and Dumbledore in the room. Severus was still unconscious and Remus looked to be ready to pass out at any minute.

Madame Pomfrey came with two little five-year-olds in tow, both fighting over who had the biggest cookie. As soon as each child saw his mother, they ran towards them and both women left the hospital wing.

Narcisa had tucked Draco's head under her chin, and before she left, approached her cousin.

"Regulus didn't want to join. Your mother and Bella pressured him into accepting; they said that, if he didn't take the mark, they would hunt you and kill you. He was scared... But it's not your fault, Sirius. Now, Bella's got what she deserves and your mother died knowing that her 'favorite' son was never loyal to the cause. He hasn''t changed the wards..." The blonde woman patted Sirius's shoulder reassuringly, then left. Draco looked at him from behind his mother's shoulder and waved his cookie goodbye towards him, while Lily kissed his cheek and Harry smacked him in the other cheek, smearing saliva and crumbs all over him.

Once the doors to the Hospital Wing had closed, Madame Pomfrey proceeded to retell the damage done to Severus. With every word that left the woman's lips, Remus's blood felt like boiling to a new degree. He really wanted to collect those Horcrux things and revive the monster once and twice again just to kill him in a new, painful way each time.

Severus had been raped at least three times, and no one had bothered to cure the tearings. He had been tortured, used like a punching bag, and for the looks of it, his hands had been broken and left to heal for themselves. He still had broken bones thoughout his body and one of his arms was put in a cast.

"Fortunately, there's no damage to his organs. His lungs are a bit bruised, but there's no major damage." said the mediwitch.

"You sait that he was raped..." whispered Remus angrily. "Is he... Dig the bastard got him... pregnant?" finally asked the werewolf.

Madame Pomfrey blanched, then, a second later, pulled her wand from her apron and cast the spell on a still unconscuous Severus. The man's belly glowed white.

"Well... Usually, when there's a pregnancy, the spell turns pink for a girl, blue for a boy, or gold if it's a half-breed. The spell was white, so no. He isn't pregnant." Everyone released the breath they didn't know they were holding.

"Thank Merlin..." Whispered Remus. The mediwitch looked at him with a raised eyebrow, so Remus elaborated. "Severus is a werewolf's mate... My mate. He's... ripe, so he can easily get pregnant, and though werewolves are the only ones that can impregnate their mates, be them man or woman, there have been rare cases where a werewolf's mate, when victim of rape, has gotten pregnant. Usually, the foetus doesn't make it because the body and magic of the 'mother' rejects it, and the abortion puts the mother in danger... In most cases, the mother has died along with the unborn child. They never make it past the fifth month..." The matron gasped in horror while the men present flinched as if in physical pain.

After Remus made sure that Severus was really there, everyone left the hospital wing. Sirius and James excused themselves to go looking for Regulus, while Malfoy followed Dumbledore to his office. Neither man knew how to destroy a Horcrux, so, once inside the Headmaster's office, Hogwarts provided them with Dark Arts books to begin their research.

Chapter 12

Severus woke up a day and a half later. Remus hadn't left his bedside and was holding one of the potions master's pale, recently healed hands in his.

Severus tried to open his eyes, but his eyelids felt too heavy to give it more than one try. Warm hands were enveloping one of his, but his fingers hurt. They felt as if someone had broken them over and over. Then, all of a sudden, the memories of what had been done to him came rushing back and hit him hard. He tried to jump back from the one holding him and flee, but his weakness was so overwhelming that he could only let out a pained whimper.

"Severus?" Whispered Remus, nearing his face to the raven's. "It's okay. It's me, Remus. You're safe, love." The werewolf caressed Severus's cheek with one of his hands while the other kept holding the potions master's hand. "It's okay, love. No one's going to hurt you anymore. Voldemort's dead. You're safe."

Severus whimpered again. He didn't know if he should trust this person. He had been fooled twice, after all. He tried to take his hand away from the comfortable warmth that surrounded it, but it was only gripped harder.

"Don't worry, love. I'll call Madame Pomfrey so that she can check on you. Please, go back to sleep." Said Remus in a soothing voice. His other hand kept caressing Severus's cheek until Severus calmed and his breathing eased. He had fallen asleep.

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The next time Severus tried to open his eyes, he could barely distinguish where he was. Everything was dark, except for a few torches burning in the corners of the walls. He blinked his eyes several times to try to adjust his vision, and the first thing he saw was a figure resting in a chair by his bedside. He noted too that one of this person's hand was holding his own, and that it felt warm and good. Severus was very confused.

He tried to extricate his had from the other's appendage when the figure stirred. Severus stiffened.

"Severus? Are you awake?" asked the man in a whisper. "Wait, love. I'll call Madame Pomfrey."

The man took out his wand and Severus's breath hitched. Silver strings of mist erupted from the man's wand, forming a majestic wolf, which promptly ran away with the instruction to bring back the mediwitch. A few minutes later, a sleepy Madame Pomfrey appeared by Severus's side, trolley

of potions and medicine following her not far behind. The mediwitch erected a privacy spell around the three of them.

"Severus, dear, I'm glad you finally woke up." Said the witch in a cheerful tone. "I'm going to cast a few diagnostic charms on you, so that I can be able to know how your healing is going, hm? Please, stay still." Severus did as he was told.

He didn't understand what was happening. The last thing he remembered was being dragged to a dirty, foul-smelling, cold cell after the Dark Lord punished him for refusing to have sex with him. Needless to say, the man raped him again and unleashed all his anger on Severus. He had been so hurt and bleeding profusely that sometime after he was thrown in the cell he lost consciousness.

The man, who he now recognized as Remus Lupin thanks to the torch that lit beside his bed when Madame Pomfrey approached, looked pensive and worried for a second, before focusing his eyes on Severus.

Severus avoided his gaze, remembering why exactly it was that the Dark Lord had decided to rape him a second time: the Dark Lord had forced him to sleep next to him ever since the first time, when that night he had a dream; Remus was standing in front of him, they were in a clearing, and then Remus's and his clothes vanished. Remus started to make love to him and he didn't realize that he shouted Remus's name in his sleep when he came; unfortunately, the Dark Lord noticed and was so furious with Severus that he ended up raping him.

After that, things became hell. Twice, the Dark Lord disguised himself as Sirius Black and Remus Lupin respectively. The first time he tricked Severus, he made the young man believe that Dumbledore's Order had found him and had come to rescue him, only to lead him to an empty room and forcing himself on Severus. The madman had told him that Severus had to learn his lesson, that Severus belonged to the Dark Lord and him alone. It was awful to watch one moment Sirius Black's face panting and distorting in hateful pleasure, eyes as red as blood, above him, and the next, those same red eyes in the face of his rapist. Riddle hadn't held back then, just as he didn't the last time he raped him as Remus.

That happened the day he had been brought to the cell. The Dark Lord, for some reason, had left him alone, locking Severus in his room and sending elves to deliver his meals. Severus had tried every wandless trick he knew to open the doors to no avail, when one day they just clicked open. Severus was so desperate that he didn't even think that it could be a trap. He was careful. It was dark and no one was patrolling the hallways. He had heard some muttering from the other side of the door; the Dark Lord was supposed to be absent for two days; it was the perfect time to escape. When Severus finally made it to the front doors, he heard footsteps approaching. He could make out the silhouette of a man coming closer to where he was hiding in the shadows, and Lupin's face was illuminated by the dying sun. He felt cold dread grip his spine in a tight grip and he couldn't move. Suddenly, warm, amber eyes changed to a scarlet blood red color, pinning him to his hiding spot. The next thing he knew, he was in a dark cell, woken up by a sharp stinging pain and something warm leaking from his back. A few minutes later, everything went dark.

Madame Pomfrey noticed Severus's heartbeat pick up. It was clear that the young man was agitated, so she decided to spell some calming draught in his system, since he was too far gone into his own mind to snap him out of his panic attack. Remus was worriedly rubbing Severus's hand in his, looking without being able to do anything. He could feel Moony howling in agony at seeing his mate so distressed.

"Will he be okay?" asked the werewolf, never taking his eyes from Severus's pale face.

"I hope so. I imagine that he's desoriented; he doesn't know where he is, but once he calms down

enough, we'll try to explain." The mediwitch kept waving her wand around Severus in slow motions, always making sure to keep it in the raven's range of vision.

Slowly, Severus started to calm down, making sure to keep his eyes focused in the ceiling above him. He could still feel warm hands enveloping one of his, and his grip tightened fractionally before laying it limp. "Where... Where am I?" asked the potions master in a croaky voice.

"You are at Hogwarts, love. We found you almost two days ago. You are safe now. Voldemort's dead." Whispered Remus.

Severus's breath hitched. He couldn't believe it... "How...?" he tried to ask, but the words died in his throat as the first tear fell from his obsidian eyes. Remus stood to wipe his tears.

"We'll tell you what happened as soon as you're strong enough to hear it, sweetheart." Said the mediwitch. "You were in a right state when you were brought here... but no more talking about it. What matters is that you are safe and Remus here will make sure that you sleep comfortably. You need to rest, Severus. You still need to heal." Pomfrey grabbed a bottle from her cart and asked for Remus to help her lift Severus's head. "Drink this, Severus. It's a dreamless sleep potion. It will help you rest while the other potions finish healing you."

Severus slowly drank the potion, feeling drowsy with every swallow. Soon, he was asleep. Remus tried to go back to his chair, but Severus's hand tightened around his and whimpered in his sleep; Madame Pomfrey looked at both men with an understanding expression and waved her wand, making Severus's bed a little bit bigger. Remus understood the mediwitch's action and quickly climbed into the bed, aloowing Severus to settle on his side and spooning him from behind. The werewolf fell asleep contentedly for the first time next to his mate.

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Sirius knocked on the front door of the Black Residence, number 12 Gimmauld Place. He felt strange, going back to the place he had left behind ten years ago. James put a hand on his shoulder and encouraged him to step inside the manor when the door opened itself. Both Aurors looked at each other before stepping inside. In the drawing room, Regulus stood, perched in the mantelpiece, looking at the flames.

"What are you doing here?" asked the youngest Black with a sombre, cold voice.

"Regulus..." Sirius's voice escaped him like a whisper. He cleared his throat. "Regulus, I know that you are aware of the... recent events corncerning your Master." Said Sirius. He couldn't take his eyes from the younger, more mature figure of his brother. Had really ten years gone by so fast? He could barely remember Regulus's 15th birthday... The day his mother banished him from the family and blasted his face from the Family Tapestry. He hadn't been able to forget Regulus's teary face, nor the pain that contorted his still child-like features.

"Yes. I know what you want." Regulus's dark, cold timbre broght him back to the present.

"Are you going to give it to us?" asked James. Regulus's aristocratic features hardened when Potter's voice reached him.

"And why, exactly, would I do that, Potter?" Asked Regulus, a sneer in place when he turned to address the Aurors. None of them had forgotten the confrontation that took place the first day of school in Regulus's sixth year at Hogwarts. How the younger boy had begged his brother to go back home, to be with him... to not abandon him, when Potter... seven times be damned Potter, approached them and told Regulus that Sirius had never belonged to the Blacks, and dragged him

away. Potter took the only family member he truly loved, that's why he hated him that much.

James squared his shoulders, knowing well that he had no right to ask anything from Regulus after abandoning him the way Sirius and him did; but they had no other choice.
"Because we know that you were never truly loyal to that madman. Are you aware of what it is that he gave to you? Why he was so keen on you keeping it safe?" Said Potter, trying to appeal to Regulus's common sense. The back haired young man nodded, but turned back to the flames.

"I know what it is and what it does when you have it near. It nearly drove me mad... I've tried to destroy it with no success..." Said Regulus.

"Dumbledore is searching for the remaining pieces. Lucius has already informed him of where to find them." At that, Regulus's head perked up.

"Lucius?" he asked.

"Yes. He came to us almost a week ago. He knew that Voldemort was a bigger threat than he was a solution. He wanted an out of the war and got it." Said Sirius, extending a hand to his brother. "We can give you an out of this too. Just give us the Horcrux, Reg."

Regulus looked at his brother's outstretched hand and hesitantly took it.

"How do I know that I can trust you? How do I know that you will not abandon me again?" He asked in a hesitant voice, turning accusing eyes at Potter.

Sirius pulled Regulus to his chest, hugging him with all his might, trying to make up for ten years gone.

"I swear on my magic that, from now on, I'll always be there for you, Reg. No matter what." Regulus started to sob into Sirius's chest and returned the hug with force.

James felt awkward at seeing the fraternal displlay of affection, but secretly was so happy for his best friend. When he deemed it enough, he cleared his throat, forcing the brothers to separate. Regulus cleaned his tears and cleared his throat too, calling his house elf a second later.

"Kreacher, do you remember the locket I gave you a few years ago?" The elf's eyes widened in fear.

"Y-yes, master. Kreacher remembers." said the house elf.

"What did you do with it?" asked Sirius. Kreacher turned to glare at him.

"Kreacher tried to destroy the awful thing, but it don't die." spat the elf at Sirius's feet, then turned to look at Regulus with a pleading look. "Kreacher tried, master, but Kreacher was not successful in destroying the evil thing! Please master! Please forgive this lowly servant! I failed you! I failed you!" The elf was about to punish himself when Regulus caught one of his hands in his.

"Kreacher it's okay! Not even I could destroy it, but my brother and I will try once more. Can you please bring the locket to me?" Kreacher eyed James and Sirius warily before nodding and popping away. A few seconds later, he came back with an hexagonal locket. It was made from emmerald and gold, with a big, silver serpent in the shape of an S in the front.

Everyone could feel the darkest magic emanating from it. Regulus took the locket with a summoned dragonhide glove and put it inside a little box he took from the mantle.

"Well... Where should we go now?" Asked the younger man.

"Dumbledore's office, in Hogwarts." Said James. Regulus could only arch an eyebrow and roll his eyes when his brother led the way to the door.

Chapter 13

The next morning, Remus woke up to the feeling of someone staring holes into his skull. Once he opened his eyes he could see that his arms were firmly wrapped around Severus's legs. He nuzzled into them and placed a kiss on Severus's hips, over his pajama bottoms; then, raised his head to see those beautiful onix eyes looking at him with fear.

"Shit!" thought Remus as he lifted himself to be at eye level with the other man.

"Hey! How are you feeling?" Asked Remus in a soft tone. Severus's eyes opened even more if possible and his hands, that were clutched to his chest, started to tremble.

"W-who are you?" Asked the potions master in a shy voice, taking a look at his surroundings and gasping with surprise. Remus had no idea if it was a good or bad sign.

"I'm Remus... The real Remus, Sev. And we are at Hogwarts." The werewolf tried to take one of Severus's hands in his, but the dark-haired man startled.

"Y-you're lying... W-where is he?" Asked Severus, feeling trapped and alarmed. His nerves were about to burst. The last time he had tried to escape, the Dark Lord had punished him immediately.... If this was some kind of sick game from the man, he wasn't so sure that he would survive. Severus started to struggle in the bed, trying to get away from this fake Lupin's grasp.

When Remus let go, Severus pushed himself to the headboard and hugged his knees to his chest, shivering slightly. This scene caused heartache to the werewolf, who suddenly had an idea. He started to unbutton his pajama top and opened it up only to be able to reveal the awful scar in his torso that the attack in Hogsmeade had left behind.

"Severus, look at me." whispered the man, trying to not scare the other. When Severus hid in on himself further, Remus placed a hand softly on one of Severus's knees. "Please, love. Just look at me for a second." Severus tried to jerk away from him, but stopped immediately when he suddenly looked at the silvery scar tissue that covered part of Remus's shoulder and chest.

Severus gasped and tentatively extended a hand to touch it, but couldn't bring himself to do so at the last moment.

"Do you remember how I got this scar, Severus?" asked Remus in a calmed tone, trying to look at the dark-haired man in the eyes.

Severus nodded, and this time reached out to touch his scar. Remus felt himself being pushed to the bed on his back and all of a sudden Severus had a wand in his hand.

"Legilimens!" shouted Severus, and everything was frantic from there. Remus's memories were scattered all over the place because of the surprise attack. He could feel Severus picking and discarding memories left and right, but finally decided to stop in the memory of the day he was rescued and watched the whole scene play out.

When Severus released him, he had a raging headache, but he didn't pay attention as sobbing distracted him. Severus was back at the headboard, knees to his chest and hands covering his mouth trying to stop himself from crying. He still held Remus's wand in his hands.

"Sev... May I come closer?" asked Remus. Severus looked him in the eye and threw himself at the werewolf, letting go of the wand and locking his arms in the man's neck, effectively knocking him back on the bed.

Remus could feel the warm tears of Severus soak the collar of his pajama top, but he didn't care. He locked one of his arms around Severus's waist and the other held his head, trying to calm him.

"It's okay, love. You're safe. He will not come back. We'll make sure of it..."

Remus kept holding the man to his chest until Severus fell asleep again.

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James, Sirius and Regulus landed outside the gates of Hogwarts, rushing inside the castle to get to Dumbledore. Once they reached the Headmaster's office, Regulus put the box on the desk and waited for the old man to say something.

Dumbledore only looked at him with a raised eyebrow after glancing at the locket.

"I trust that this is the original locket of Salazar Slytherin?" asked the headmaster.

"The one and only..." said Regulus. "Kreacher and I have tried to destroy it, but nothing we try works." Dumbledore pulled the diary from the drawer and put it in his desk.

"Lucius and some aurors are retrieving the rest from their hiding places. They left fifteen minutes ago." said the old man. Regulus had expected something like that from Malfoy.

"Well... he gains amnesty... What's in for me?" asked the youngest Black unabashed.

"The same. Lucius told me that you were from the lowest rank amongst Tom's followers, and that he only gave you the locket because of your cousin. We can convince the aurors about your innocence." said the headmaster. He knew that Regulus was trying to act all bad boy, but he had looked inside the boy's mind when he was first marked in his seventh year. He was afraid and coerced to do it; it hadn't been his choice.

Regulus was about to talk when the door to the headmaster's office opened, and in came Narcissa with her son. As soon as Draco saw Regulus, the little boy ran to him and jumped to his arms.

"Hey Dragon! How are you?" said the man, hugging the boy to his chest.

"Reggie!" said the child between giggles. "I have a new fwiend!! His name is Hawwy!!"

"That's good baby!" said the man, tickling the boy's belly. As if on cue, Harry barrelled into the

office, nearly colliding with his father's legs.

"Hey champ!" said James, lifting his child. Harry smacked a kiss on his father's cheek.

"Lucius sent a message. He said that they found Helga Hufflepuff's lost cup in my sister's house. It looks like she had it displayed on top of her mantlepiece as a trophy..." Said Narcisa, looking at Dumbledore in the eyes. "He said that he would send an Auror to bring it here.

Regulus and Sirius looked at each other, both wearing unimpressed and exasperated expressions on their faces.

"No offence, Cissy, but your sister has never been as bright as you always thought her to be..." said Sirius. Narcissa only shrugged.

"No one accused her of being it..." said the blonde. As soon as she finished her sentence, the flames of the hearth in the Headmaster's office shone a bright green, and out came Kingsley Shackebott with a black satchel in his hand.

"We retrieved another one. Malfoy and Moody went to Gringotts; we checked the house from top to bottom and only found the cup. He must have hidden his Horcrux in Gringotts." said the Auror. Narcissa looked pensive for a moment.

"Rodolphus and Rabastan had a family home in Jersey. Rodolphus never took Bella there... Had I been married to her, I wouldn't have either. She destroyed everything Rodolphus cared about, be it material or sentimental. She hated him. Maybe they hid those things there." Said Narcissa, reaching for her baby. Regulus passed the child to her and she moved towards the door. "Rabastan took Lucius there once; I'm going to tell him that he should check there too. Auror Shacklebott, you may want to take more Aurors with you... I don't doubt that the place is ridden with dark hexes for protection."

Dumbledore took the satchel from Kingsley and extracted the cup with his wand, placing it on his desk besides the diary and the locket.

"Only three more to find and we can start the ritual." said Dumbledore.

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Harry was a happy child. He loved to make friends, and he loved that his friends made friends with his other friends, so he couldn't understand why Draco and Ron didn't get along at all, or why the mothers of said children looked at each other the way he looked at vegetable soup; so he took it upon himself to ask his mommy what was going on.

"Mommy... Why Dwaco and Won don' like each other?" Asked Harry, his big green eyes shining with curiosity. Lily, personally, thought that the centuries old feud between the Malfoys and the Weasleys was stupid, and she said as such.

"Because they think that the problems of their ancestors belong to them, which is dumb." said the redhead, looking first at Molly and then at Narcissa in the eye. "Kids are kids, and they should be playing with each other and enjoying their childhoods instead of worrying about stupid family feuds." Both women looked ashamed, but Narcissa and Molly picked their sons each and seated in chairs that were each opposite to the bed Remus and Severus were occupying.

Severus had woken up a few minutes before the trio of mothers, with their sprogs, entered the Hospital wing, and was being checked by Madame Pomfrey, who had a very giggly Ginny Weasley attached to her right leg. The dark-haired man was still wary of his surroundings and the

people there, but since no harm had been done to him in the last couple of days, he was starting to feel safe, specially because every time he woke up, there were always a pair of strong hands caressing him and making him feel all warm and fuzzy.

Molly had come in all worried and screaming bloody murder. Her only daughter (almost three years old), had been sent through the floo by her twin brothers, and landed in the mediwitch's office. It was no secret that Ginny loved her godmother, and that Pomfrey loved the little girl back, but she was taken aback when she saw her hearth spit green fire and heard a child crying.

Now, though, Madame Pomfrey had asked Severus to take care of Ginevra Molly Weasley while she retrieved the girl's mother... and here they were, half an hour later, with a very asleep Ginny resting in Severus's chest. The baby hadn't wanted to let go of the man.

Harry had asked his mom to put him back on the floor and ran to climb on the bed where Remus and Severus were resting. The werewolf easily caught him and cradled him next to Severus, both were looking at the potions master while he was looking at the little girl sleep.

"Moony!" asked Harry in a not so sublte whisper. The werewolf turned to look at him. "When ar' you and Sevewus gonna have a baby? You can't keep Ginny! She alweady has a mom and dad!" chastised the boy.

Remus felt Severus tense and could clearly see the color rising on his neck. The werewolf chuckled.

"Well... I don't know, Harry. Everything depends on Severus." Remus whispered back, wrapping his free arm more securely around Severus.

"Awwww Moony!! But I want to pway with your baby now!" screamed Harry, making all the adults blush and swoon at the same time with his tantrum.

"We're glad that you are back with us, Master Severus." said Molly, arranging Ron in her lap. "Arthur says that if you ever need anything at all, we are here for you."

Severus looked at the woman and her child and nodded, a small smile gracing his thin lips. "Thank you, Mrs. Weasley. I appreciate it."

Molly Weasley became a key factor in the success of his business. He got from her the ingredients he couldn't grow himself and sometimes, she brought or sent him recipients with her most delicious desserts. Currently, though, her husband, as part of the Order of the Phoenix, was helping the Aurors and Lucius Malfoy look for the remaining Horcruxes to kill the Dark Lord for good.

Suddenly, the door to the Hospital wing opened and Sirius, James and Regulus came in.

"James, darling, why don't you, Sirius and Regulus take the boys down to Hagrid? Harry was mentioning that he's got another pup and wants to see it." Said Lily out of nowhere. The three children jumped from their places in their respective mother's laps and ran to the three men.

"Yay!!! Yes daddy!! Take us to see the new pup!" Yelled Harry while jumping up and down. Draco and Ron forgot for a moment their feud and joined Harry in asking the adults to take them out.

Once the three men and the kids were out the door, Molly exhaled and produced a carton box out of nowhere, giving it to Severus in exchange for her passed out daughter.

"Here, I was planning on coming to see you today anyway." said the woman. Severus carefully opened the box and the sweet smell that was released had everyone groaning in pleasure. The box

was full of those cinnamon rolls that Severus had come to love so much.

"Oh Molly, you didn't have to..." said Severus, already feeling his mouth water from the flavor that he could almost feel on his tongue.

"I don't know what the big deal is." Said Narcissa with an air of superiority and disdain around her. "My house-elves can cook those things even better."

"No offence Mrs. Malfoy, " started Remus, trying to sneak one of his hands into the open box to grab a roll. "But Molly's cooking and baking can be second to none. Auch!" yelled the werewolf, shaking his hand to dispel the pain from the slap in the hand that Severus delivered.

"There seems to be enough for just a piece EACH!" said Severus, extending the box to offer a roll to all the present.

Narcisa, reluctantly, took one and with much disgust took a bite. Not even a second later, she was rolling her eyes to the back of her head and moaning at the taste of the baked good. Lily and Remus were in a similar state. Severus, after taking one for himself, took Remus's wand from the bedside table and cast a few charms and wards to prevent his gift from being devoured by strangers.

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It took another two days to recover the remaining Horcruxes. Now, the diary, the locket, the cup, Ravenclaw's diadem, the Gaunt's ring and a silver frame holding the picture of Merope and Tom Riddle's wedding were on the desk of Albus Dumbledore. James, Sirius, Regulus, Lucius, Severus, Kingsley, Arthur and Moody were placed strategically around the desk, erecting a shield around the objects, while the Headmaster chanted an ancient spell. Soon, they could see dark smoke leave the objects and crash against the shield, trying to free itself. All of a sudden, the objects started to spontaneously combust, first it was the diary, and so on. The black smoke formed an eye and, when the last container was burned to ashes, it released an ear piercing scream and imploded, leaving nothing behind.

"The ritual is complete, gentlemen. You can lower your shields." said Dumbledore in an exhausted voice, letting himself fall onto his plush throne-like chair.

Severus looked at the charred desk, not believing that it was finally over.

"What about the rest of the Death Eaters?" he asked. Lucius and Shacklebott looked at each other and nodded.

"We finally caught them all. You don't have to worry about being prosecuted, Severus. You have my word." said the Auror. Severus felt the tension leave his body at the words of the man.

Remus knew that it was going to be difficult for Severus to get over this trauma, but he would be there every step of the way. The werewolf reached softly with his hand and intertwined his fingers with Severus's, who let him come closer and kiss his cheek.

"I promise, Severus. From now on, I will keep you safe." Whispered the werewolf into his ear. Severus had no doubt that the man would make good on his promise.

Chapter 14

To say that recovery was an easy thing for Severus would be an understatement. Even though the young potions Master was always with someone accompanying him, he sometimes felt like he was being watched.

Remus, Harry, and now little Draco had taken to keep him company in his shop. Sometimes, little Ron Weasley would join too and Severus would take to teach them what little the kids could grasp about potions whenever he had no customers, while Remus would only look at them with longing.

One of those days, Severus was on alert. The potions master was so nervous that even the little ones could sense it. Ron had attached himself to one of Severus's long legs and hadn't let go, to the point where Severus had to carry him around in order to be able to move. Remus could sense that Severus was nervous too, and that put him on edge. He stuck to one of the windows, and saw a dark shadow come near to the shop. He could not see the face of the man that was coming, but he could clearly see the wand in his hand and how this person was pointing it towards Severus's shop, tip glowing in a dark red sheen.

Remus took Harry and Draco and shoved them into Severus's personal space.

"Take them to Hogwarts and stay there." said Remus in a frantic voice. He didn't have time to give more instructions when all of a sudden a blast of dark red light crashed against the wards surrounding the shop. Remus could see the people outside the shop start to run and Severus's eyes opened wide. The potions Master took Harry and Draco's hands in one of his, while he asked little Ron to take a handful of floo powder and throw it in the hearth, stepping inside with the kids and disappearing in a flare of green flames, while Remus cast his wolf patronus and sent it to Hogwarts, asking James and Sirius to bring help.

Another blast crashed against the wards and this time the whole building shook above Remus's head. The werewolf readied his wand and a spell to the tip of his tongue for when the wards fell, which was about to happen any moment now.

The man took the hood of his head and Remus could finally see his face. Igor Karkaroff looked like he had been dragged from the last circle of hell. His eyes were sunken in their sockets and his face looked haunted and grim. The man was so thin and his fingers so slender that his wand was barely hanging from them.

"Snape!" Yelled the man with a raspy, deep voice. He prepared his wand again and another blast of red light crashed against the wards of the building, effectively shattering them and making the

building tremble.

Remus had no other option but to confront the man; his patronus had gone off to Hogwarts to call for reinforcements and he was sure that his friends would be here any minute.
The werewolf stepped out of the building and with his ever present patience confronted Karkaroff.

"Severus is not here, Igor. What do you want?" asked Remus with a tired, unimpressed voice.

"Where is that traitor?! Our master chose him and because of him now we don't have a leader!" yelled the Death Eater.

"It was not Severus's fault that your Master fell. He brought his own downfall to himself... it was long overdue." answered Remus with his same calmed demeanor.

Igor was preparing himself to attack Remus when all of a sudden he fell to the floor. Remus had struck him with a petrifying spell while the other man was distracted.

Remus came close to Igor, crouching to be within hearing range. He took the wand from the man's fingers and pushed both of his sleeves towards his elbows, exposing the dark mark on the man's left forearm.

Remus bound him and put a shield and anti apparition wards around him so that he couldn't escape. Soon, James was running towards him, Sirius following close behind and Moody appeared out of nowhere.

"It's Karkaroff. He has the dark mark." declared Remus. "He was trying to get to Severus."

Moddy nodded and lifted the wards around the Death Eater, asking Sirius to come with him and deliver the other man to the Ministry. Both Aurors dissappeared.

"Are you ok, Moony?" asked James. "Lily was with Dumbledore when Snape came in holding the kids. They are all safe."

Remus felt a weight lift off his chest.

"The bastard blasted Severus's wards despite being emaciated and in bad shape. It only took him three tries to shatter them. It's not safe for Severus anymore." said Remus in a solemn and angry voice.

James didn't know what to say. He knew that, even after three months, Remus and Severus both had issues regarding the last one's abduction. Remus was constantly looking out for Severus. He spent every free moment he had with the potions master and what was more telling about the situation was that Severus wasn't even objecting to the fact that Remus practically lived with him.

"Have you told him about..." trailed James. Remus shook his head in a negative way.

"I don't think that it's the time to tell him. He gets all awkward whenever I try to even caress his cheek... I don't want to think about what he'd do if I told him that we are mates." answered Remus in a self deprecating tone. He turned to go back to Severus's shop and started to cast protective wards towards the property. James raised his wand and started to cast too.

"Then, when will you do it? You can't just let things get between you, mate. I'm not telling you that you have to force him. Just explain things to him and make sure that he understands that you'll never hurt him." said James, trying to encourage his friend. It pained the Auror to see one of his best friends pinning after someone and not being able to do something.

"What if he rejects me?" whispered Remus. James had never heard him so vulnerable. "What if... What if he decides that he doesn't want me? I don't think that I could stand it..."

"In that case, you'll just have to give him time... Besides, you have three little and adorable kids on your side. Harry, Draco and Ron love you both, and Harry has been short of annoying with the way he pesters Snape about kissing you..." said James in a teasing tone. Remus let a happy little smile show on his face.

"Ron loves Severus more than he likes me. I'm not that sure that he'd be comfortable to share his Sev with me... Hell he barely tolerates Harry being all handsy with Sev." the werewolf laughed. After Molly's visit that day in the Hospital Wing, he had learned that Molly was a crucial element in making Severus's potions business a success. The Weasley matriarch provided him with all the herbs he couldn't grow in his own little garden.

He had also learned that all the Weasley children had some kind of regard for his Severus: William looked up to be a cursebreaker, specializing in potions, thanks to Severus's influence; Charlie was thinking of becoming a dragon tamer, and Molly hinted that he would become Severus's number one dragon-proceeding ingredients supplier; while Percy was not as close to the potions Master like the rest of his brothers, he was polite to the man and admired him for his achievements, and conducted himself with rectitude and honesty, no doubt the result of his admiration for Severus and his own upbringing. The twins were a 'pain in the ass' for Severus, but Remus knew he was willing to babysit for Molly whenever she needed it. Remus had been present during one of these times, and while the twins were certainly little demons, he discovered that Severus was the only adult that they were willing to listen to and actually obey, maybe because Severus let them experiment with his 'twins-proofed potions kit' so that they could "invent' some pranks. Ron and Severus held a special connection: Molly had gotten into labor inside Severus's shop when the woman came to deliver some ingredients. Ron had been born a month earlier than scheduled and had decided to make his grand act in Severus's potions lab. The potions Master had been forced to deliver the child on his own, lest he risked mother and child while waiting until a mediwitch arrived. Severus had been named Ron's godfather and little Ronnie loved him to bits. He was very possessive of the man, and only let Harry and Draco near him because he knew that none of those kids shared that special connection with the man. Ginny was just a baby, and she was not so attached to Severus, but she loved him well enough.

James whistled in admiration

"Wait! We've known the Weasleys for some time... How come we didn't know that they held such a close relationship with Snape?" asked the man with glasses.

"Well, none of us had a relationship with Severus at the time, and it's not like Molly goes around telling her business secrets..." said Remus. James only nodded in acceptance.
Once they were done with the wards, both men entered the shop and locked it , using the floo to go back to Hogwarts.

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Severus was seated in one of the chairs in front of Dumbledore's desk. He was trembling slightly and the old man was trying to reassure him.

Sirius had come back already, telling them that Moody and Shacklebott had taken Karkaroff into custody and to Azkaban when James and Remus came out of the fireplace.

"We've restored the wards around your shop, Severus." said Remus after Sirius finished telling them what had happened with the Death Eater.

Severus was about to cry. He just wanted to live in peace... that's why he decided to not join the monster that had taken him and raped him and tortured him senseless...
Remus felt his mate's distress and ran up to him, falling in one knee and taking Severus's hands in his own.

"I promised that I would never let anyone harm you again, Severus, and I'm going to keep my promise." whispered the werewolf. Severus nodded.

"I know... That's why you took me out of there... but you won't be around always..." Severus whispered back.

Severus looked back at James, who only raised an eyebrow.

"Severus... there's something I need to tell you. Could we go somewhere private?" asked Remus. Severus frowned, but nodded.

Soon, they were outside the Room of requirements and Remus opened the door that appeared. Both men entered a cosy room. It was small, but enough for their purpose. It had a fireplace and a loveseat in front of it.

Remus led Severus to the loveseat and both sat there. The werewolf took both of the potions master's pale hands in his and had a hard time figuring out how exactly he was going to tell him about...

"You're my mate." Said Remus, bluntly. Severus could only blink his eyes.

Remus took a fortifying breath and continued.

"Every werewolf has a mate... a destined one that they will share their lives with... A special someone, if you must... And you're my mate, Severus." Remus dared to look at Severus. The raven-haired man looked a bit confused and then opened his eyes wide. Remus tightened his hold on Severus's hands when the potions master tried to take them back. "Severus, please! I'm not going to hurt you, I just want you to..."

"Stop!" Said Severus in a strong tone. Then... "So it's true..." he whispered. "He said that you only wanted to get close to me because you needed me to survive, not because you really liked me..." Severus removed his hands forcefully from Remus's and stood up. "That's why you came back... Why you won't leave me alone..." Severus started to hyperventilate. Remus noticed and ran to hold the crumbling man in his arms.

"Severus! Listen to me!" said Remus, falling to his knees with Severus between his arms. Remus lifted Severus's face and realized that the dark eyes were too far gone. Severus was probably occluding, and his breath came in short pants, gasping for air. Remus knew enough about Occlumency to realize that if he dared try Legilimens on Severus, he would only make him sink further into himself, so he decided to just hold him and try to soothe him.

When Severus was a bit calmer, Remus conjured another cushion, so that they could be more comfortable while sitting on the floor. Remus was still clutching Severus to his chest and the potions Master had hidden his face in the other man's chest.

All of a sudden, Severus started to talk.

"He said that what you felt for me was fake... That you weren't actually in love with me, but that your wolf made you seek me so that you could complete the bond and not die... He said that you were only playing games with me... That he was the only one that loved me..." Severus had started

to cry.

Remus didn't know what to do... It was true that he had reached for Severus after he learned of their status as mates, but even before then, he had been conscious that he had had feelings for the then dark boy, even if they were just platonic in nature. Remus sighed and decided to tell him the truth.

"Severus, I want you to listen closely to what I have to say. Please, don't interrupt me, ok? I really need to make some things clear." asked Remus while lifting Secerus's chin with his fingers and trying to look him in the eyes. Severus nodded and reclined against Remus's chest again. "It's true that I tried to reach out to you when I found out that you were my mate, but it wasn't when I came back to Hogwarts..." Remus gulped. "Do you remember that night in the Shrieking Shack?" he asked softly, Severus tensed and nodded hesitantly. Remus continued. "That night... That night was the first time ever that I could remember what happened when I was in my wolf form. I could clearly recall the terror in your eyes and the paleness of your face. Moony, my wolf, understood that you were terrified about something, and he was trying to protect you, not eat you... When we came closer to you, we could smell your scent... Gods, Severus! It was the msot amazing thing we had smelt in forever! You smelt just like heaven... like home... Moony got horny and... well..." Severus nearly knocked Remus in the chin with the top of his head. Both men stared at each other until Remus couldn't help it and looked away, a soft blush tainting his cheeks.

"Moony was... trying to..." Severus gulped. He couldn't bring himself to finish that sentence. Remus only nodded.

"Moony was trying to mark you as his mate. He recognized that you weren't ready for the full mark, so he would have just... sniffed you down there and pierce one of your wrists with a fang, nothing more." Severus relaxed a bit, but decided to let Remus finish what he had to say and reclined against his chest once more. "When James got you out of there, Moony got so mad that he even tried to break against the Whomping Willow... breaking one of our ribs in the process... Sirius managed to drag Moony back inside the tunnel and stun him... When I woke up in the Hospital Wing, I had full recollection of what had happened, then Dumbledore took us all to his office and you know what happened there... After you left, I told James, Sirius and Dumbledore what had happened." Remus paused for a moment. "Two days later, Sirius and James had somehow roped Lily in in my secret and the fact that you were my mate, and convinced her to help me get you. Back then she was still mad at you for the name-calling, but she realized that she missed you... She somehow decided that she wanted you back, but she wouldn't be the one to give the first step so..."

Severus nodded. He knew that Lily was so proud of herself, and so was he; but back then both had been so angry and stupid... Remus continued after a moment of silence.

"Then I realized that I couldn't keep chasing you when you had a bright future as a potions Master ahead and I had nothing to offer you but trouble. My lycanthropy was not known, but I realized that there was little chance that I could keep any apprenticeship for more than a year with my monthly disappearing three days in a row to transform and recover; I had no great inheritance that I could happily live off of, or any special talent unless I became a lab rat in exchange for money... Luckily, James's mother had worked in the Department of Mysteries in the area of Ancient Runes, and accepted to make me her apprentice... When Dumbledore offered me the teaching position, I couldn't refuse, especially knowing that you were living in Hogsmeade..."

Remus stopped talking and started to rub circles in Severus's back instead.

"When were you going to tell me about... about this?" Asked Severus in a neutral tone. Remus laughed a humorless laugh.

"To be honest? Never. Those times I looked for you when we were still in school, I did it because I thought that I had a chance... Even before I knew you were my mate I had some kind of feelings towards you... It troubled me that the object of my 'platonic' affections was bullied by my best friends, and I thought that I was going to get over it in time, but then... it didn't. When I came back, all I wanted was to get close to you and make you fall in love with me just as much as I had fallen in love with you through the time we were apart... I know it may sound weird, but I kept track of your developments through the news, and everytime you achieved something, I felt wild pride overtake me and make me fall in love with you harder." Remus hugged Severus tighter. "I thought that it was impossible to love you even more, but then you gave me a chance to be your friend, and every time we exchanged words, I realized that I was absolutely doomed. I can't love any other person just because of my lycanthropy, Severus... I can't and refuse to love another just because they wouldn't be you... You, absolutely ridiculous, stubborn, lovely, intelligent man."

When Remus finished his speech, Severus was in tears. He felt so overwhelmed by all the information and honestly didn't know what to do with it. At some point, he thought that he knew what he felt for the man holding him, but now he wasn't so sure anymore. The Dark Lord had made his job, planting doubts and fears in his head, and now he was doubting even more this man. He needed to get away. And fast.

Severus pushed away from Remus and he let him.

"I... I don't know what to say... I'm overwhelmed and I need time to think about things... I'm sorry." Said Severus.

Remus didn't even have time to say something. Severus had ran off the room and now he found himself alone. The werewolf felt like crying, and so he did.

Chapter 15

Severus had no idea of what to think. He knew since the beginning that Remus's intention to 'become his friend' sounded kind of weird. After all, even when they were in Hogwarts, Remus had never bothered to look in his direction twice. Then, after that awful day in the shrieking shack, the sandy-haired boy followed him everywhere like a lost puppy, always trying to apologize and even befriending Lily... Then, Remus had left Hogwarts and Severus was careful all those years to avoid crossing paths with him and his friends, until this year... Remus had come back to his life and had been treating him like a decent human being; and somewhere along the line, Severus thought that it was because the werewolf was honest in his feelings towards him. Now it all ended being a plot to win his mate over.

Voldemort was right. He couldn't trust someone that had their own agenda and were only using him.

It hurt.

It hurt to think that Remus was only using him to appease his own needs. It hurt that Lily had been part of it all along; pretending to want him back when she only wanted to help her new best friend. It hurt to know that the only person who had shown him that they truly wanted Severus just because he was himself, was now dead because they were a megalomaniac.

Severus had always known it, he was not someone that people loved just because they wanted to love him. He was only a tool for everybody else...

Severus ran all the way from the room of requirements to Hogwarts's main entrance, almost colliding with James Potter, who grabbed him by the arm and made him stop abruptly.

"Whoa there! Where are you going, Snape?" asked the bewildered man.

"It's none of your business, Potter. Leave me alone." said Severus. He yanked his arm free and was about to leave when Potter asked him something.

"He told you, didn't he? About the soulmate thing..." Said James in a vulnerable tone. He couldn't think of any other reason as to why Snape was angry and looked like someone had betrayed him. James felt that something bad was going to happen...

"So you knew..." whispered Severus. "Yes... of course you knew..." he laughed a humorless laugh and a tear escaped from his eyes.

"I knew I shouldn't have let you lor come too close to me... i knew that you would only hurt me..." said Severus. He dropped his gaze and started to walk past Potter, with the intention to go back to

his home.

James, for his part, was feeling kind of miserable and panicky. He didn't know if he should stop the man from leaving the castle or let him go... Anything he did, at this point, could only make things worse.

"Severus!" yelled a familiar voice, followed by loud and fast footsteps. Both Severus and James turned to look inside the main hallway of the classroom and they could see Remus running down the stairs, with a determined look on his face.

Severus gasped and started running away from both marauders, but Remus was soon right behind him... Damn him and his werewolf abilities!

Remus started to run faster when he realized that Severus was about to cross the gates of the school, and was about to catch him when a sudden, loud 'pop' was heard and Severus nowhere to be seen. Remus caught his footing and disapparated right after. When Remus landed in front of Severus's shop, he tried to cross the wards, but they immediately repelled him, sending him flat on his arse. Severus had erected again his 'anti-marauder' wards, as he so called them.

Severus was exhausted. He felt so betrayed and used... Then, from the security of his window apparel, he could see Remus fall to the ground when he tried to cross the wards. The man's eyes were completely glowing amber and Severus shivered... He could never forget those eyes... This was not the Remus Lupin that he had talked to some moments ago... This was Remus Lupin the werewolf... the beast that had tried to attack him and kill him all those years ago...

Remus looked right at him through the wards and another shiver ran down his spine. The wolf looked furious and... sad... The werewolf took out his wand from his pocket and conjured some kind of tent right in front of the window Severus was looking out from, conjuring also lots of blankets and pillows and food. It was clear that he wasn't planning on leaving anytime soon.

Severus sighed and turned around, with his heart beating fast.

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It had been 3 days since Remus had installed his camping tent outside Severus's shop. Dumbledore had visited him on the second day and after being informed of what was going on, he allowed Remus to stay as long as it took to make Severus see reason.
Severus opened up his shop like normal, customers were coming and going and all of them looked at him weird. He was trying to find ways to remove the 'anti-marauders' ward, so he had asked James and Sirius to come by, even Lily and Harry had tried and only the baby could cross the barriers. Lily had wept when she realized that she was not welcome in Severus's shop.

On the fourth day, Remus asked for Harry and little Ron to spend the day with him. He told Mrs. Weasley of what was happening and of Severus's status as his mate, which the witch approved of.

"The lord above knows that that poor boy has been on his own far too long. Make sure to take care of him, Remus dear. I'm sure that Ronnie will be willing to help you win him back." said the matriarch, winking at him.

So, that's how Remus woke up to find himself a Friday morning with Harry and Ron draped over his body. The kids had spent the night in the tent with him in a sleepover that was going to last the whole weekend. The kids were still asleep and drooling all over him, which made Remus amused and disgusted in equal parts.

When Ron and Harry woke up, they decided that they wanted Severus to join them for breakfast, so both kids marched up to Severus's shop and knocked three times each.

When Severus came down, still dressed in his nightshirt and a bathrobe, hair rumpled from sleep and rubbing his dark eyes in a cute way, Remus nearly exploded in lust.

"Sevewus!" yelled Harry. "Come breakfast with Moony and us! Come! Moony is pwepawing eggies and bacon and we hungwy and want to eat!"

Ron only looked at his new best friend and nodded dumbly. Severus arched an eyebrow and looked at the redheaded boy, who blushed and attached himself to his long legs.

"Pwease uncle Sev. Come breakfast with us?" asked the boy, looking up at him with cute puppy eyes.

Severus hated that look on the boy, since he knew that when Ronnie asked for something with that look on his face, not even the great potions master could deny him.

Normally, Ron was a very Gryffindorish boy, selfless and loved to help the people he loved; seldom did the boy use manipulation to get something for himself, like the dog he bribed Molly to get him two years ago for his birthday. Honestly, the boy was too pure and too Gryffindor to manipulate, but he couldn't have imagined that he would be using his manipulative streak on him...

Severus saw Remus's head peek from the entry of the tent, only for the man to dart back inside as if nothing had happened. Ron and Harry had attached each to one of his legs and it was very difficult to walk with the extra weight.

Severus sighed but said nothing, only dragged his legs back inside his shop and lifted each child onto the counter.

"Uncle Sev... Moony is outside." said Ron, pointing at the window where he could see Remus's sad face plastered on the cristal, looking at them with longing. Severus looked him in the eye and noticed that Remus's eye color shifted from glowing amber to soft honey brown. He felt an ache in his heart at seeing the defeated look in the other man's eyes.

Severus sighed and transfigured his bathrobe into a warmer coat.

"Ok. I'll go." he said, finally. Harry and Ron whooped with joy and ran all the way to the door. Severus followed them at a tamer pace and opened the door for the kids to run out. Both babies threw themselves at Moony and tackled him to the ground.

"Uncle Sev is having breakfast with us!" yelled Ron, letting out a giggle when Remus caught him.

"Uncle Moony! Pwepare eggies!! Sevvie is hungwy!" yelled Harry.

Severus could only shake his head in mock exasperation when he saw the mess the kids were making. They both wanted the werewolf to feed them but weren't letting him get up.

Severus could notice that it was a magical tent the one Lupin was using, it had a stove and the things to prepare omelettes were already out, so, while Remus tried to make Harry and Ron behave, he went to check on what was missing and started to prepare their meal.

The kids immediately stopped harassing Lupin and went to see what Severus was doing.

"Can I help you Sevewus?"asked Harry.

"Me too!" yelled Ron.

Severus only turned to look at them briefly before turning to Remus, who was still sitting ob the floor looking at him stunned.

"Make yourself useful, Lupin, and help the kids wash their hands and get them seated at the table." commanded the dark-haired man.

Remus nodded dumbly, but did as he was told. When he and the kids came back, Severus had already fixed the table and in the center there was a plate with seven omelettes. Ron and Harry sat next to each other, not noticing Severus's distress at taking the seat next to Lupin.

"It smells yummy Uncle Sev!" said Ronnie. Taking his fork and knife in hand and licking his lips.

Severus gave him a tight-lipped smile.

"Ok, we have cheese and ham omelettes for the kids..." said Severus, serving one to each kid, "and bacon, bell pepper and cheese for the adults." he finished, serving Remus and himself.

"Yay!" yelled both kids in unison, attacking their meal.

They ate in silence. Severus divided the last ham and cheese omelette in half and gave one to each kid, then served Remus and him the two left.

"This is the best breakfast I've had in awhile, Severus. Thank you." said Remus, with hope shining in his eyes. Severus only nodded and continued eating his breakfast.

As soon as the kids were done, they ran to the playpen, leaving the adults to themselves. The atmosphere around Remus and Severus was charged with tension; Remus didn't want to be the first one to break the silence for fear of making Severus run back to his shop, but he so longed to hear his velvety voice; he was greatly surprised, though, when Severus was the one to start talking.

"So... Are you going to help me clean the dishes?" asked Severus in a shy voice, while standing up and taking the plates to the sink. Remus sto9od up abruptly and nodded, but his eagerness made Severus step back a few feet.

"S-Sorry, Sev. I didn't want to startle you." he said, taking the glasses in hand and going to the sink too. Severus nodded in acceptance of the apology and followed him.

"So... I wash and you dry?" offered Remus. Severus had prepared breakfast, after all; he couldn't let him do all the work.

Severus nodded again and he handed him a towel, managing to brush those slender, potion-stained fingers with his own for just a second, before Severus snatched the towell away. Remus was washing the second plate when Severus started talking again.

"I... I'm sorry for how I acted that day..." he said. "I shouldn't have left like that." Severus kept his eyes on the towel in his hands, but he could see that Remus was surprised by his apology.

After a few seconds, Remus nodded, turning his attention back to the dishes. The kids could be heard playing with some toys.

"I'm sorry for not telling you sooner." said Remus in a dejected tone. "I... I truly regret the way me and my friends treated you. After the incident in the shack... After you left Dumbledore's office, I had to tell them. I realized how close I had come to losing you forever for some stupid kids'

behavior... even though I never had you to begin with. I realized how much of a coward I had been for not standing up to James and Sirius for treating you the way they did, just because I didn't want to lose their friendship."

Severus couldn't blame him for wanting to keep his friends. He had wanted to keep Lily for himself, after all, going so far as to humiliate himself in front of all the Gryffindors by begging her to forgive him and be his friend again outside the fat lady's portrait while it was still open... He couldn't forget how Potter and Black had come out after Lily had left, and literally kicked him when he was on the floor crying. He remembered that Lupin was the one who picked him up and took him to the hospital wing when his friends left him alone, only because he had started to bleed. All of a sudden he wanted to vomit.

"I... I don't know if I will ever be able to commit to being your mate, Lupin. There's too much bad blood. I know you never actively participated in all the things they did to me, but this is just too much." whispered Severus. He could feel Remus come closer and place a hand on his shoulder.

"I know, and I'm sorry." said the werewolf. "I'm not asking you to... mate with me right now. All I ask is that you let me earn your trust. Give me a chance to redeem myself to you, to show you that I can be that special someone for you, regardless of the fact that you will always be the only one for me." Remus's hand raised to clear Severus's hair from his face, then he settled it on his chin. "All I ask, Sev, is that you give me a chance." whispered Remus.

Severus didn't dare to look him in the eyes. He was afraid of what could happen if he did, but Remus was relentless; with just his thumb pressed to Severus's lips, Remus made him look at him, and Severus's heart jumped to his throat when he saw the sincerity in the werewolf's eyes. All of a sudden, Severus's eyes began to sting and he turned around abruptly, colliding with the table. Remus managed to catch him before he fell to the ground.

Severus tried to struggle against Remus, but the werewolf held him tightly to his chest, always careful to not hurt him; then Severus stopped struggling and Remus could feel the other man's slender hands ball into fists while clutching his sweater. He started to rub circles in Severus's back to try to calm him while murmuring sweet words in his ear.

Severus felt like the whole world was upon his shoulders, but at the same time he felt like a feather while being held in Remus's embrace. He felt overwhelmed because he didn't want to let go of his grudges and all the pain he had been subjected to, but he was tired of being alone just because he didn't want to accept what was readily being offered to him. He wept also for the thingd he knew he could have and had always longed for if he accepted Remus. He was no idiot. He had done some research in those three days and he knew that, if they both so desired, he could carry Remus's children. Since he was a kid, all Severus ever wanted was to belong, and to have his own family; he always thought that it would be impossible, what with him being nasty, ugly and gay... But Remus offered him all of this and more... Remus was not only offering him to belong, he was offering love...

"Shh. It's okay, love. I've got you." whispered Remus, and hugged him tighter when Severus wrapped his arms around him and buried his face in his neck while trying to calm himself. "It's okay."

A few minutes later, Harry and Ron came over, both kids giggling at seeing their favorite uncles hug each other, making Severus separate from Remus, if only for some inches, since the werewolf had his arms securely against his waist.

"Uncle Sev... Are you goin' to mawwi Remus?" asked Ronnie in a shy, yet happy tone.
Severus wiped the tears from his face and smiled at the boy.

"I don't know... Maybe someday if he asks nicely." said Severus with a trembling voice, making the kids yell a 'yay' before turning around and running back to their playpen, while Remus stood still in shock staring at him.

"Are... Are you serious?" asked Remus in a whisper. "Are you going to give me a chance?" Remus tightened his hold on Severus, pulling him even closer.

"Yes..." answered the shorter man. Remus gave him a big smile and tried to kiss him. Severus stopped him with a finger on his lips. "But I never said it was going to be easy." replied Severus.

Remus smiled the stupidest smile in the history of stupid smiles ever.

"I know, but I will love you regardless." he said.

Then, after debating with himself for a moment, Severus leaned in and pressed a tender kiss to Remus's cheek, using the werewolf's stunned expression to disentangle himself from those strong arms and going to play with the kids.

"Don't forget the rest of the dishes." said Severus, looking at a still stunned Remus.
A few seconds later, the werewolf smiled and shook his head in fond exasperation, going to the sink to finish his task.

Remus knew that it wasn't going to be easy to win back Severus's trust, and that it would be even harder to win his love, but he'd be damned if he ever let him go again.

Chapter 16

The next time Remus saw Severus, he was walking down the main street in Hogsmeade with Harry and James in tow looking for a birthday present for Lily.

Things between Severus and her were not so good after everything that happened, but she was trying to get him back.

Remus walked to Severus's shop and rang the bell when he opened the door. The dark-haired man looked like he would fall face first any minute. He was unusually pale and had big bags under his eyes. Remus came closer to check him over when all of a sudden Severus sneezed and doubled in effort from the sheer force of it.

"Sev, what's wrong?" asked the werewolf, immediately picking Severus up bridal-style and carrying him inside the shop, James and Harry following close behind.

"An idiot came in yesterday... He wanted a remedy for the flu but sneezed in my face..." said the poor man, hiding half his face behind a tissue before sneezing again. James picked Harry up and stepped back into the doorframe.

"Awwww Sevvie! I take care of you!" said little Harry, reaching out to Severus with his tiny arms.

"I don't think that's a good idea right now, champ. Severus is sick and for the looks of it... It's contagious." said James with aprehension.

"Don't worry Harry. I'll be fine tomorrow." said Severus, trying to calm the fussy baby.

"I'll take care of him, Harry." said Remus, leaving Severus for a bit and going where his best friend was. "Here, take this money and buy a present for your mother. Make sure it's the best and tell her that I'm sorry I can't be there for her birthday." said Remus, extending a pouch with a few golden coins in it.

Harry took it warily.

"But if I go... I can't be with Sevvy." said the baby.

"Harry, we will resume your lessons once I'm better. Don't worry about me." said Severus in his most professional tone.

Harry nodded sadly, but once he said goodbye to Moony, left the shop with his father.

"You don't have to stay here..." said Severus before sneezing again. Remus only smiled and picked him up again, carrying him all the way to his flat upstairs.

"Which is your bedroom?" asked the werewolf when he reached the top of the stairs, leading into a narrow hall with five closed doors.

"The one on the left at the end of the hall" said Sev in a hoarse voice.

Remus marched towards said door with the man of his dreams in his arms. With a wave of his hand, Remus opened the door and cast a lumos to illuminate the room. He walked in and deposited Severus on the bed, sitting beside him.

"Where is your potions cabinet? Have you drunk something for the flu yet?" he asked. Severus only shook his head lightly.

"I woke up when you rang the bell. Haven't been able to." said Severus, making himself confortable under the covers and closing his eyes, fully intending to go back to sleep. Remus shook his shoulder gently.

"Where are your potions, sleeping beauty? First you need a pepper up and then you can go to sleep..." Severus only raised a hand, pointing to the door at the other side of the hall. Remus went to retrieve the potions, but when he returned, Severus had fallen back asleep. He sighed and walked to the other side of the bed, taking off his shoes and settling over the covers, hugging Severus from behind.

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When Severus woke up, he noticed that the pounding in his head had vanished, but he still had his nose constipated. He noticed too that he was hugging a muscular arm with his own thin ones and that a heavy weight was settled upon his back. He could also feel something hard poking his left buttcheek.

The arm he was hugging tried to be removed but Severus hugged it back into place, eliciting a soundless laugh from its owner.

"How do you feel?" asked Remus, attaching himself further to Severus.

"Constipated, but my head doesn't hurt anymore." said Severus.

"Well, you can drink the pepper up potion and then I can go fix some chicken soup." offered the werewolf. Severus nodded, but didn't move. Remus let out a soundless laugh again.

"If you don't let me move that chicken soup will never be cooked." he said. Severus nodded again, but didn't let go anyway. Remus was aware of his 'little friend' and where it was, but since Severus wasn't letting him move, he decided to risk it and stretched as far as he could over the dark-haired man to get his wand and summon the vial from the bathroom.

Once he had the vial in hand, Remus made Severus drink it and steam left his ears, which Remus noted were very cute. Once the steam stopped, he couldn't avoid the impulse and covered Severus with his body, burying his face in his hair and taking his ear into his mouth, nibbling the tip. Severus squealed, but Remus didn't dare to point it out.

"Your ears are very cute." said Remus, letting go of Severus and helping him sit on the bed.

Severus's face was red as a tomato, and he couldn't avoid looking at the obvious tent in Remus's pants with trepidation.

"Don't worry, love. I won't ever force you to do anything you don't want to. You know that, right?" said Remus with a bit of sadness tinting his voice. He knew that Severus was still traumatized from his experience with the Dark Lord, and he understood.

"But... But what if I want to..." whispered Severus. Hiding his face with his hair. Remus sat back beside him.

"It's okay if you want to, love. I just don't want to hurt you or force you in any way..." said Remus.

Severus reached one of his hands to tangle his fingers in Remus's hair, pulling him towards his face. Severus closed his eyes and started to nuzzle Remus's face, stopping for a second when he reached his lips and gave him a chaste kiss.

Remus was surprised for the action, but soon found himself following Severus's lips when he broke the kiss.

Severus had this adorable look on his face that made it difficult for Remus to stop himself from kissing him senseless, but he could resist the temptation until Severus stood up and straddled him, sitting his bum on his legs and wrapping his arms around his neck. Remus wrapped his own arms around the other man's thin waist and pulled their chests together. Severus reached out again to kiss him and this time he didn't let go.

The kiss was passionate and desperate on Severus's part, while Remus tried to imprint his desire and love for the man in his arms. All of a sudden, Severus ended the kiss and buried his face in Remus's neck, hugging him hard.

"Hey... What's wrong, love?" asked Remus, caressing Severus's back.

"I don't know what's happening to me... I feel so safe with you... I know that I said I would give you a chance, and I mean it, but I have never felt so secure, so... loved... In my life..." said the dark haired man. "All I want to do is be with you forever and I'm scared..." he whispered at the end.

Remus tightened his arms around Severus.

"Oh, Sev... You have no idea how I feel towards you... I swear that if I could, I would take you far away from here and hide us, just the two of us... All I want is to protect you and love you always." the werewolf turned his head and softly kissed Severus's head. "What you feel is normal. I'm not forcing you into feeling something towards me, it's just the natural bond between soulmates. It's natural for you to feel secure when you're with me because of that... It's natural that you feel loved... because I actually love you." he said.

"I know that you love me..." said Severus, kissing him softly on the lips. "I know that I'm not yet in love with you, though I'm falling, Remus. I'm falling hard for you and that scares me... I don't want you to ever leave me."

Remus could feel the vulnerability radiating from Severus in waves. He could smell the fear mixed with his mate's natural essence and he could only hug him harder to comfort him.

"I swear on my magic that I will never willingly leave you, Severus Snape." said Remus, kissing Severus's lips one last time.

Chapter 17

It was Harry's birthday. The boy turned eight that day and all his friends - including Draco Malfoy, had been invited. The blond boy, much to his parents' dismay, enjoyed being surrounded by Weasleys... Especially the youngest boy, Ronald, who Draco didn't leave alone even to go to the bathroom.

The kids were playing in the yard at Potter Manor, running after each other playing tag, when all of a sudden the three little boys ran into someone, tackling them to the ground without noticing who it was.

"Careful there, pups." said Remus, getting up and helping the three kids to stand up as well.

"Remus!" yelled Harry, turning around as if looking for someone. "Where is uncle Sev?" asked the boy. Ron took Draco's hand and all of them looked for the dark-haired man.

"He'll be here soon, Harry. Don't worry." said the werewolf. The three kids took him by the arms and dragged him all the way to where the party was going on. Lily and James were delivering food to the guests and the kids continued playing, when they heard a pop of apparition near the edge of the house.

Severus went directly to the garden, where everyone was chatting and was received by an eager Harry. Ron followed his lead and then Draco appeared behind the redheaded boy when Ron hugged his godfather.

The look in the blond's eyes didn't go amiss from Severus and he smirked after ruffling his godson's hair.

"Sev! I thought you wouldn't come." said Harry, hugging Severus's waist and not letting go after the man started walking.

"I promised that I would, didn't I?" he asked. "I just went to pick up your present." said Severus, holding out a wrapped package in front of Harry's face.

It was a medium sized box, wrapped in silver and gold paper and a green ribbon. Harry took the present and Severus kneeled to his eye level.

"Remember that I promised you would have your own potions kit when you were ready?" he asked, and Harry's eyes shined with awe.

"Yes." Harry whispered reverently.

"Well... What are you waiting for? Maybe you will be able to teach Ginny something..." at Severus's words, Harry nodded shyly and his cheeks tainted a faint pink. Severus winked at him.

Harry kissed Sev's cheek in thanks and went to his mother, showing her the present. When Harry noticed Ginny standing by her mother, he went to her and after saying something, the girl looked at her mother and she nodded. Harry and Ginny went inside the house.

Remus appeared and hugged him from behind, planting a kiss on his cheek.

"Think James will be thrilled at knowing his boy has already chosen his significant other?" asked the werewolf, rubbing one of Severus's sides with one of his hands.

Severus shrugged.

"He most likely already knows. I bet he has already prepared an engagement ring or something like that" he said.

Remus hugged Severus harder, almost crushing him to his chest, to which the potions master laughed.

The party ended with all the Weasley kids plus Harry and Draco falling asleep on the grass under the early stars of the night: Harry hugging Ginny to his chest and Draco sprawled on top of Ron. Molly had casted a warming charm on them so that they wouldn't get sick while the adults had retired to the drawing room.

Remus was cuddling with Severus when suddenly Severus shifted and arched his back hissing in pain.

"Sorry," said Remus, patting the breast pocket of his sweater and sucking in a breath when he remembered what was in there. Severus noticed his expression and narrowed his eyes towards his boyfriend.

"What's that?" he asked, reaching a hand towards Remus's pocket. He stopped short when Remus sprang from the sofa and situated himself in front of Severus, clearing his throat and drawing everyone's attention towards them, which made Severus flush.

"Remus?" asked Severus uncertainly. The werewolf turned to look around at the other adults present and cleared his throat once again, while going down on one knee.

Molly, Lily and Narcissa gasped in unison, covering their mouths in surprise, while the men only looked with eager eyes at the pair. Remus pulled a little black velvet box out of his pocket and opened it in front of Severus, who gasped in utter shock at what laid before his eyes.

"Severus Tobias Snape, I ask you here, on this day, in front of all our dear friends, to make me the happiest man alive by becoming my beloved husband." said Remus in a very composed tone, which surprised even himself.

Severus's eyes filled with tears and he raised his shaking left hand, allowing the werewolf to place the beautiful diamond band on his ring finger. It was thin, and in the middle of the diamonds there was a beautiful obsidian pebble.

Once the ring was sitting firmly on Severus's finger, Remus kissed his knuckles and then raised him and kissed him senseless, while the men cheered and the women cried happy tears. Even the Malfoys joined in the celebration, calling the attention of the kids inside.

"Mummy... What's going on?" asked Harry in the middle of a yawn, still holding Ginny's hand.

"Uncle Remus and Uncle Sev are getting married, sweetie!" said Lily, ushering the rest of the kids inside the room.

Harry opened his eyes like plates.

"And who gave you permission to marry my Sev?" asked Harry to Remus in a mock angry tone.

"Harry..." warned James, but Harry's face split in a huge grin, while running and hugging Severus.

"Promise you'll still love me more than Uncle Remus?" Asked the boy.

"Oi!" said Remus in mock offence, then Severus grinned and returned Harry's hug. The youngest Weasley kids were in a second all around Severus, hugging him and congratulating him, while Charlie and Bill managed to sneak up behind Remus and whispered something in his ear that made the werewolf nod solemnly.

Soon, Bill and Charlie were hugging Severus and in that simple action, Remus understood why the threats to castrate him if he ever dared to hurt Sev. Each of the older Weasley boys kissed one of Sev's cheeks affectionately, hands around his waist and hugging him between them like a Weasley-Snape-Weasley sandwich. Remus barely suppressed the growl that threatened to escape his throat. Now he understood why the seventh and sixth year Gryffindor boys spent so much time recently in Sev's apothecary.

As soon as well wishes for the newly engaged couple were said and toasts had been made, the guests left, including Severus and Remus. When they landed in the front door of Severus's apothecary, Remus kissed goodbye Severus and turned to leave, but before he could so much as grab his wand to apparate away, he felt Severus grab his sleeve, turning him around and planting a soft kiss to his lips.

"Would you like to spend the night here?" asked Severus shyly. Remus nodded dumbly, following Severus into the apothecary and then through a narrow staircase towards the second floor of the building, where Sev's little flat was.

Severus went to the kitchen to prepare some tea the muggle way, waiting for Remus to follow him when all of a sudden he was embraced from behind, arms hugging his narrow waist. Severus giggled when Remus buried his nose on his neck and started to breathe in his scent.

"What's it with you?" asked Severus a bit amused. "You've been a little weird since we left the Potters'." Remus breathed in once more before giving Severus's cheek a kiss and resting his chin in the other's shoulder.

"Bill and Charlie have the hots for you." deadpanned Remus. Severus only laughed.

"You're crazy, they're basically my little brothers." said Severus, not believing Remus's words. Then, he could feel a growl rise from Remus's chest; he knew then that the werewolf wasn't kidding. "Are you serious?" he asked, a little bit more subdued. Remus only nodded.

"They threatened to castrate me if I ever hurt you." he said. Severus only raised his eyebrows in surprise. "I didn't like the way they hugged you back then... You plastered between them... They

were trying to show me what would happen if I ever messed up." Remus's voice had gone an octave deeper, and Severus knew that Remus was really annoyed.

Severus finished messing with the stove and turned around in Remus's embrace to look him in the eye, being careful to steer them away from the fire. He raised his arms and encircled Remus's neck, placing a small, innocent kiss on his lips.

"You know I love, you, don't you?" asked Severus in a placating manner. "They are like my little brothers, Rem. I've watched after them since I met them. I love them, I won't deny that... But the kind of love I feel for them is different than the one I feel for you." He said, stepping even closer to Remus, leaving no space between them. Remus hugged Severus's waist even harder.

"I know that... Otherwise you wouldn't have agreed to marry me." said the werewolf, smacking a kiss to Sev's lips. "But it still bothers me the way they touched you."

"Are you jealous Mr. Lupin?" asked Severus in a playful tone, nuzzling Remus's stubbled jaw with his nose.

"Yes." whispered Remus, feeling his groin start to twitch in interest at Severus's action.

"Well... what if... what if we forget the tea... and you make sure to erase their smell from me?" asked Severus shyly, burying his face in Remus's neck, nipping at the soft skin there.

Remus extended one of his hands to turn off the muggle stove and immediately picked Severus up by his thighs, making him wrap his long, slender legs around his waist and carried him to his bedroom.

After the incident with Voldemort, Severus had been wary of any kind of touch. Sometimes it was difficult for Remus to even peck him on the lips without Severus going into a panic attack. It took two years after Remus and Severus got together to allow Remus to touch him over his clothes, and another more before Severus allowed him to take off his shirt and worship his thin torso as he pleased. Even now, six months from when they took that step, it was as far as Remus was allowed to go, but it was okay. He suffered, he could admit that, but he was willing to wait for Severus until he was ready.

This time, however, was different from all the others, because it was the first time ever that Severus insinuated they got to the bedroom. As soon as Severus was laid on the mattress, Remus positioned himself on top of him and started to kiss him to his heart's content. Soon, Severus was panting and his delicate, very capable fingers were losing themselves inside Remus's jumper and shirt, caressing his firm abs. Remus kissed Severus's mouth with abandon, until Severus moaned due to the lack of air. Then, Remus moved to his chin and neck, spending a good amount of time kissing and sucking behind Severus's ear, which was one of Sev's erogenous zones.

A small whimper escaped Severus's lips, the slender man involuntarily bucked his hips, colliding with Remus's hard length and moaned. Severus started to tug on Remus's clothes, trying to get them off but still caressing that firm chest from under the garments.

Remus understood the message and vanished his upper clothes with a wave of his hand, along with Severus's; then he proceeded to attach his mouth to one of Sev's pink nipples, nipping on it until it was puffy and hard from all the attention.

Severus moaned for real this time and bucked his hips again when Remus latched onto the other. He scratched the man's pectorals with his short nails, leaving red marks behind.

"I want you..." whispered Severus in Remus's ear, while bucking his hips upwards. Remus hissed and nipped at Severus's nipple even harder, leaving red marks around it.

"Don't play with me..." growled Remus, devouring Severus's mouth in a hungry kiss. Severus carded his fingers through Remus's hair in an affectionate manner.

"Just... Just promise you'll be gentle..." whispered Severus when the kiss was broken. Remus stopped any caresses he was giving and looked Severus dead in the eyes.

"Are you sure that you're ready, Sev?" asked the werewolf with all the seriousness he could muster at that moment; Severus nodded and kissed him chastely on the lips.

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The wedding day was approaching fast. They had chosen the date to only five months after Remus proposed, which meant they would have a winter wedding in December, right after Hogwarts let students go to their winter break. It was the beginning of November and the only thing missing was Severus's wedding gown, which was driving him into anxiety's arms. Lily had suggested a lace wedding dress she had seen in an apparel while shopping in muggle london with Harry; she even snapped some pictures to show it to Severus, but the man refused.

"I am not a goddamned woman, Lily." he had said.

As soon as Dumbledore had been made aware of the impending union, he had suggested that they use the Great Hall to hold the event. Remus immediately agreed.The big day was only two weeks away and Severus still had no wedding gown, and Lily had started bothering him again with that lacy dress, which started to look more like an option every day that passed.

Finally, two days before the ceremony, Severus had acquiesced with Lily about the dress and she had gone faster than a flash to buy it according to Sev's measurements. When she arrived, she made Severus try it on, so that she could charm it to fit in the right places.

"Oh Sev..." the redhead had whispered in awe when Severus finally came out of the bathroom wearing the dress. In her opinion, Severus looked perfect, she could only wonder what Remus would think once he saw his future husband looking like this.

The dress fit perfectly from the neck to the toes, it was made of white silk from the chest down and part of the arms, leaving the shoulders, collarbones and neck to be covered only by delicate white shimmering lace. That same lace fell from the waist down forming falls of fabric that allowed for easy movement although the dress had a straight skirt. It looked like a second skin on Severus.

When he looked in the mirror, following Lily's comment, he couldn't stop admiring himself. True, Severus Snape had never been a vain person, but right now, in his very own personal opinion, he looked good.

"Now try on the shoes..." said Lily, extending a pair of white plain slip-on shoes that were covered by the dress anyway. The shoes didn't add anything to his height, but he didn't care about it, since he thought that Remus being taller than him was kind of romantic. "Ok, now we need to think of what to do with your hair and your makeup..." finished the redhead with a million ideas running through her mind.

"Makeup?" asked Severus a bit confused.

"Yes, I won't let you walk down the aisle barefaced!" she said, Severus only nodded dumbly.

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The wedding was a success. The great hall had been decorated by house elves according to the occasion, with white and red roses and some violet petals decorating the white carpet for which Severus had to walk towards Remus.

The groom was waiting by the altar dressed in a black suit covered by a silver gala cloak, gifted to him by Sirius, who was acting as his best man, James next to him to give support to their best friend.

By the time Severus walked down the aisle, Remus broke down in tears. The raven-haired young man was absolutely gorgeous. Severus was wearing his wedding dress, his long, dark hair piled up in a messy bun decorated by tily, white flowers and curled strands of hair framing his face. Nude shimmering eyeshadow and a fine winged eyeliner decorated his eyelids, a bit of mascara curling his lashes. Faint rosy blush dusted his cheeks and a cherry scented faint lipgloss gave a soft look to his lips.

"You look beautiful, Sev. I love you so much it hurts..." said Remus, holding Severus's hands in his when the smaller man reached his side.

"I love you too." Said Severus, giving him a soft smile.

Dumbledore commenced the ceremony; everyone was enraptured by the beautiful words Remus and Severus spoke to each other and some even cried. Then, the headmaster performed the spell that would bind their souls together and a beautiful pair of wedding bands engraved with runes and encrusted with rubies appeared on the old man's hand.

"I, Remus John Lupin, take you, Severus Tobias Snape, as my soulmate and lawfully wedded husband, by the rites of old traditions and by mother magic. I hereby pledge to you my very life and soul." said Remus, taking Severus's hand and placing the finest ring on his finger, giving it a soft kiss afterwards.

"I, Severus Tobias Snape, take you, Remus John Lupin, as my soulmate and lawfully wedded husband, by the rites of old traditions and by mother magic. I hereby pledge to you my very life and soul." answered Severus, also placing the ring on Remus's finger and giving it a kiss too.

"You may kiss each other." Finally said Dumbledore.

When they exchanged their first kiss as husbands, everyone started to applaud. The kids cheered them on while the adults shed some happy tears on their behalf.

Dumbledore waved his wand and the benches were replaced by tables decorated by white and blue tablecloths. Everyone took a seat and immediately food appeared.

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Severus and Remus had decided to keep Severus's little flat above his shop as a temporary home; They would start looking for a bigger, permanent one in Hogsmeade when the summer holidays began.

Their lives were quiet and full of love. Their new house had enough room for their future kids and a greenhouse where Severus could grow his potions ingredients. It also had a cellar that Severus used as a private potions lab and the garden was connected to a small forest, which James and Sirius helped ward so that they could come and spend the full moons with Remus running around.

Their first child came when they were thirty. Severus found out he was pregnant when he noticed

his belly getting rounder each month, they just had it confirmed by Madame Pomfrey one evening that Severus had gone to visit Remus at the castle. A few months later they received the news that they were expecting a little girl.

Remus was scared shitless because he was afraid that his baby girl would inherit his lycanthropy, but as soon as she was born the mediwizards at St. Mungo's performed all the examinations on her and reassured the new parents that she was fine. Apparently, Remus's intake of wolfsbane during the prior years had been a factor for this. She was named Thea Eileen Lupin.

James and Lily were named godparents, and Harry loved the little babe like a little sister. The Weasleys also adored the baby, and Molly and Arthur considered her their first grandchild.

When Thea turned one year old, Remus decided to quit teaching and help Severus grow his potions business, also, he was encouraged to write his very first Defence textbook, which was a success.

They continued living in their house, raising their kids and growing old together. Life was good.

The shrieking shack incident was the last drop to fill the glass for Severus Snape. Unbeknownst to him, Remus Lupin discovered something that links them both together for the rest of their lives. Remus tries to get Severus to love him without going mad in the process... Will he succeed?